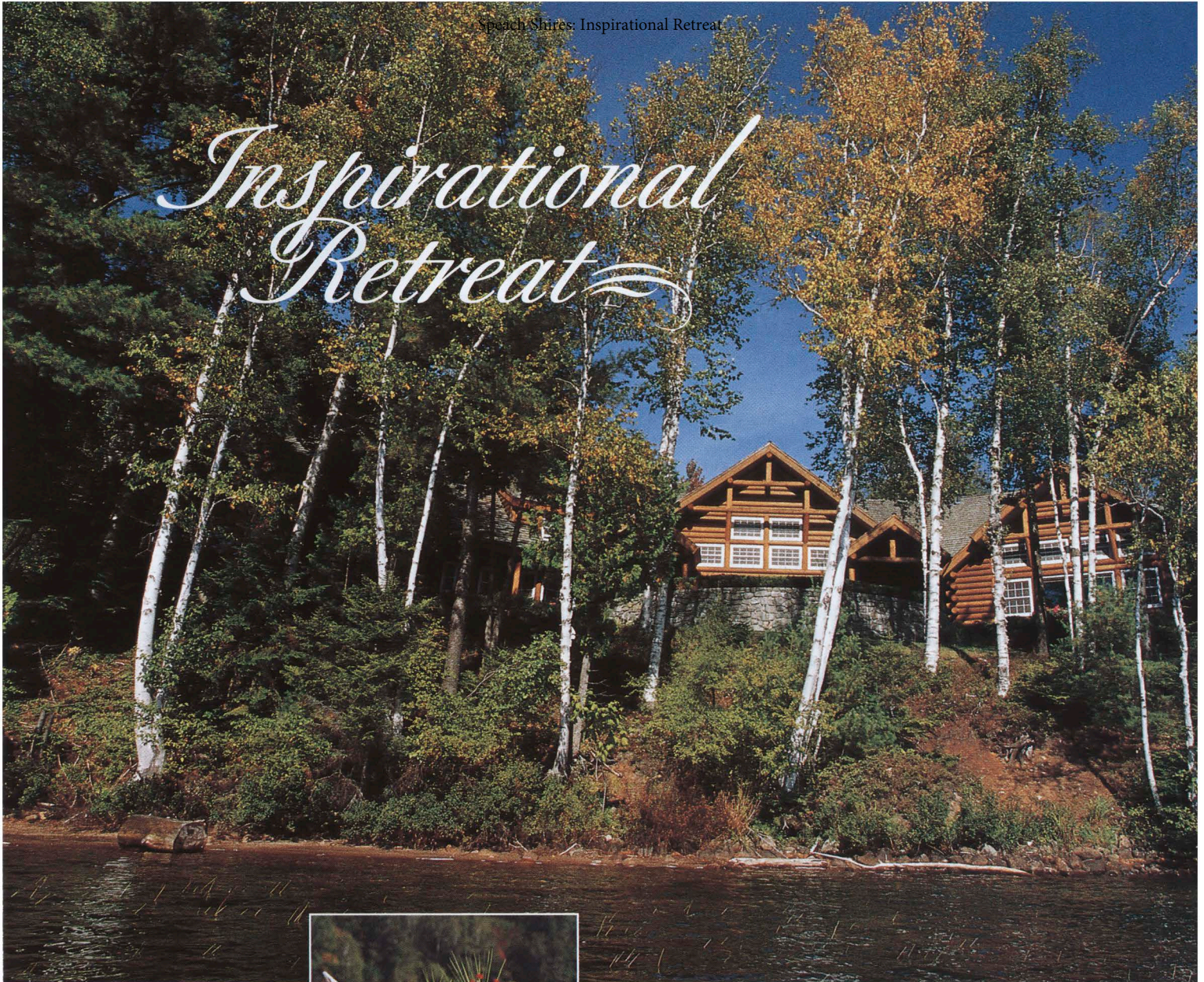


Inspirational Retreat

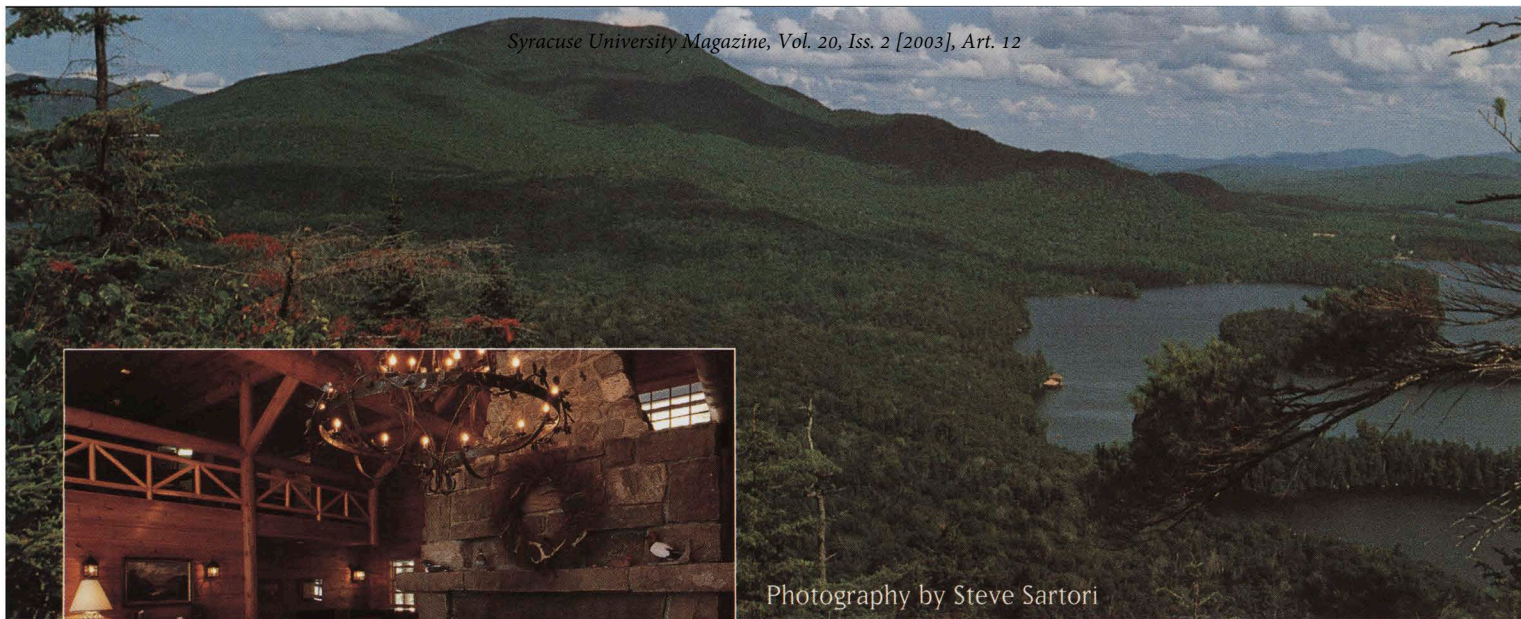


The University's Minnowbrook Adirondack Conference Center has put guests at ease and energized their creativity for 50 years



By Amy Speech Shires

The schedule for an executive development program at the Minnowbrook Adirondack Conference Center sounds like a welcomed escape from the business world: fireside chats, team-building exercises, sessions on effective decision making, and a graduation ceremony. What the agenda doesn't convey, however, are the elements that make Minnowbrook an ideal location for professional development conferences and other educational gatherings. Tree-lined paths through fragrant woodland, the tranquil sounds of birdsong, the all-season beauty of a clear blue lake circled by the Adirondack mountains, and the rustic elegance of the lodge itself provide an atmosphere of seclusion and comfort that allows visitors to ease into their



Photography by Steve Sartori

most creative and productive selves. "It's the perfect educational setting, very scenic and very relaxing," says Sherry Mossotti, executive director and CEO of Leadership Greater Syracuse, a nonprofit organization that is one of many conference center clients that returns to the facility year after year.

Originally a privately owned mountain retreat designed in the tradition of the 19th-century Adirondack "Great Camps," Minnowbrook celebrates its 50th anniversary this year as Syracuse University's educational conference facility. Located about 2½ hours northeast of Syracuse and overlooking Blue Mountain Lake, the main lodge and surrounding buildings rest on 28 acres and can accommodate up to 56 overnight guests. A member of the International Association of Conference Centers, Minnowbrook features well-equipped meeting rooms (including a 70-seat classroom and several smaller seminar rooms), lodging and dining facilities, a new health and fitness room, and recreation areas. The average group numbers 30, although groups have ranged in size from 6 to 70 people.

Throughout the year, the conference center serves as a meeting place for members of the University community, including those from various college departments, the Graduate School, many independent study degree programs, Project Advance, and student leadership and Honors student programs. It also hosts corporations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. Mass Mutual, for instance, has used the retreat annually for nearly 30 years, and the New York State Council on the Arts has held its annual gathering there for the past several years. "Programs often focus on long-term planning and goal setting, team-building, and interpersonal skills," says Jim Moore, the center's director and a 31-year employee of University College, which manages and promotes Minnowbrook. "Getting away from their regular place of business

inspires and relaxes people, and gives them a new perspective on the 'big picture.'"

Franklin P. Wilbur G'70, G'76, the University's associate vice president for undergraduate studies and executive director of Project Advance and the Center for Support of Teaching and Learning, has used Minnowbrook for 30 years for departmental strategic planning retreats and other purposes. "Minnowbrook is a great conference center that offers a combination of wonderful instructional resources with recreational facilities, comfortable housing, and fine dining," he says. "The environment is conducive to creative thought and camaraderie. And it's a chance for staff to meet in a fresh setting and see each other differently than they do at work."

"Our clients love us," Moore says, citing the high level of repeat business the center attracts. Besides the beauty of the location, Minnowbrook clients also appreciate the staff. "They are our strongest attribute, and Minnowbrook's shining star," Moore says. The center's staff consists of a live-in caretaker, a head chef, two assistant caretakers, and between 10 and 14 full- and part-time kitchen and housekeeping workers, all of whom Moore describes as loyal, thorough, and versatile. Guests often comment on the staff's quality, impressed with their ability to accommodate a group while remaining virtually unseen. "The staff is absolutely wonderful," says Leadership Greater Syracuse's Mossotti. "They are always very attentive to our more than 40 guests and work with us to ensure all the details are taken care of."

Plans are under way for enhancing Minnowbrook's capacity with an additional building that includes 10 bedrooms with private baths, a meeting room, and a social room. When Moore first began working at Minnowbrook, the concept of "conferencing" was in its infancy and visitors were comfortable rooming with two or even three others. Now, however, increased competition among conference centers for clients has amplified the need to provide guests with single rooms and private baths. The plan for a new building allows for increased privacy and would give Minnowbrook the flexibility to house more than one group at a time. "My personal philosophy has always been to look for ways to make Minnowbrook a little bit better," Moore says. "Every year I present that challenge to my staff, saying, 'We're excellent, but there's room for improvement.' And they've never let me down."