

# MELODY LAKE NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE MELODY LAKE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS



February 2026

## THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF MELODY LAKE

This year, we want to take a good look at what was and is happening around Melody Lake. We will look at the past, close to 90 years ago when it was known as Ellis Pond when just a couple property owners owned the land around the lake. Now more than 80 families use (and possibly abuse) our lake. While it's true that over hundreds of years, all bodies of water will naturally fill in and become a swamp, and then maybe even dry land, it is also true that what it takes centuries for mother nature to do, the actions of humans can do the same in decades. We still have time to stop this from happening, but must all work together. Take a long look at what we have done on our own property and then admit that we have all made mistakes. Special THANKS to Sara Warner and Mary Jo Watts who represent Melody Lake at the annual NYSFOLA conference at Lake George in early spring. While the association does pay the cost of attending, Sara and Mary Jo pay for their travel and lodging expenses and other costs at the conference. While there, they mingle with other attendees from lakes throughout the state sharing ideas and concerns that are common at most NYS Lakes. In the past year, they have developed a **"DRAFT: Melody Lake 5 Year Remediation & Restoration Plan"**. This plan will be posted on the association web site [www.stny.info/melodylake](http://www.stny.info/melodylake) Please take a good look at the plan and then bring any suggestions and concerns to a future meeting or directly to Sara and MaryJo. These concerns were probably caused by ALL OF US and it will take us all to work together to protect our beautiful lake.

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Melody Lake Association was formed on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1964 to:  
Aid and promote the preservation and protection of Melody Lake and the land around it  
To aid in the protection of fish and game in such lake and area  
To promote and cultivate social relationships among its members  
To undertake programs and activities calculated to advance the above purposes

**IMPORTANT PHONE #'S, EMAILS, DATES AND INFORMATION**

**Melody Lake Association**  
**PO Box 95**  
**Willet, NY 13863**  
[www.stny.info/melodylake](http://www.stny.info/melodylake)  
or visit us on Facebook

**HOW TO CONTACT:**

**Association Officers:**

**President** – Bob Rosati (607)863-4425 [rcrosati@frontiernet.net](mailto:rcrosati@frontiernet.net)  
**Vice President** – Bob Eastman (607)722-3294 [bob@ceserve.com](mailto:bob@ceserve.com)  
**Secretary** – Kelly Cerroni (607)760-2311 [kellycccc7@gmail.com](mailto:kellycccc7@gmail.com)  
**Treasurer** – Steve Smith (607)729-8823, [sjstev@gmail.com](mailto:sjstev@gmail.com)  
**Member at Large** – Eric Wortman (607)440-1044, [ericwortman@hotmail.com](mailto:ericwortman@hotmail.com)  
**Webmaster** – Jim Pratt – (607)775-4925 [jpratt@stny.rr.com](mailto:jpratt@stny.rr.com)

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**Emergency Response**

NY State Police – (607)756-5604 or 911  
Cortland County Sheriff – (607)753-3311 or 911  
Fire & Ambulance – 911

**NYS Dept of Environmental Conservation:**

Conservation Officer – 1-844-332-3267 (24 hr)  
Permits – 1-800-388-8244 or (607)753-3095 ext. 235  
Dam Safety – (518)402-8185

**Town Government Officials:**

Willet Town Hall – 863-4877 (for building permits)  
Town Supervisor – Alvin (Sandy) Doty – 863-3252  
Town Clerk – Annie Wilcox – 863-4329  
Highway Superintendent – Ted Kemak 863-3265  
Tax Assessor – Frances J Butler 849-6966

**Other:**

Cortland County Health – 753-5035 (permits for wells & septic)

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**DOGS AROUND THE LAKE:**

*Remember that your dog must be under your control at all times. If the dog is loose, they must remain on your property. Every year we receive complaints from people walking around the lake that they are confronted by loose dogs. Excessive barking is also a nuisance and is in violation of the Town ordinance. All complaints should be referred to the Town of Willet Dog Warden. (Country Acres Animal Shelter – 749-2734)*

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**THE MEETINGS FOR MELODY LAKE ASSOCIATION FOR 2026 WILL BE HELD AT 12:00 NOON ON THE SECOND SUNDAY OF JUNE, JULY, and AUGUST. ALL MEETINGS WILL BE HELD AT THE WILLET TOWN HALL, THE MEETING DATES FOR 2026 ARE: JUNE 14<sup>TH</sup>, JULY 12<sup>TH</sup> and AUGUST 9<sup>TH</sup>,**

**The date of the association family picnic will be determined at the first meeting in June.**

**YOUR IDEAS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE ASSOCIATION. PLEASE TRY TO ATTEND WHENEVER POSSIBLE. WE WILL ATTEMPT TO LIMIT THE MEETING TO ABOUT 1 HOUR HOWEVER WILL CONTINUE UNTIL ALL IMPORTANT TOPICS ARE DISCUSSED.**

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**WE WOULD LIKE TO REMIND ALL PROPERTY OWNERS AND THEIR GUESTS THAT EVEN THOUGH MELODY LAKE IS A PRIVATE LAKE, ALL NYS LAWS APPLY. THIS INCLUDES, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO FISHING, HUNTING, BOATING AND MOTOR VEHICLE LAWS. ALSO REMEMBER THAT ALL BOATS THAT ARE POWERED BY AN ELECTRIC MOTOR (INCLUDING PONTOON BOATS) MUST BE REGISTERED. ALL NON-NYS RESIDENTS MUST HAVE A NONRESIDENT FISHING/HUNTING LICENSE. ALL BOATS AND FISHING GEAR USED ON ANOTHER BODY OF WATER MUST BE THOROUGHLY CLEANED BEFORE BEING USED BACK ON MELODY LAKE.**

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Mon & Fri - 9:30 am – 11 am

Tues & Thurs – 9:30 am – 11:00 am & 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Wed – 9:30 am – 11:00 am & 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Sat-9 am –12 noon (also Local Farmers Market in season)

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**Remember that the speed limit on Melody Lake Rd. is 30 mph and on Melody Lane is 10 mph. Also parking on Melody Lake Road is prohibited unless you are completely off the road. Please remind your visitors and everyone that you may be doing business with such as contractors, fuel delivery companies, etc. Also remember that NO OFF-ROAD VEHICLES (ATV'S, UTV'S) are allowed on any association property (Melody Lane, right of ways, etc.) You may have noticed the speed bumps that have been added to Melody Lane. FYI, these speed bumps WERE NOT installed by the association but by a property owner that is concerned for the several small children that often play in that area. It's too bad that it has led to this. For the most part, this has slowed down MOST of the members, however, there continues to be some that just don't get it. Please slow down on all roads around the lake so we can continue to protect our children, and others.**

## A message from the President:

By Bob Rosati



As we get older, we need to keep up on our health. Having a beautiful place like Melody Lake to enjoy, our vision is an important place to begin. Look around and we can see how important it is to monitor our eye health. While it's important to go to an eye doctor annually, sometimes we can get a good idea on our eye health by just sitting around, relaxing as we look around the lake. Unfortunately, it seems that many of our members suffer from **Farsightedness** (a condition where distant objects are seen

more clearly than nearby objects). As we look around the lake, it is easier to see what our neighbor next door, or even on the other side of the lake is doing, or not doing to help protect our beautiful lake. Many times, we can overlook what is going on within our small lot on the lake while we continue to try to blame what is happening on someone else. Take the time to take a good look at what is happening with the runoff after a hard rain storm. Wade out into the lake and take a good look at what the bottom looks like. Is it muddy, or solid? Does there seem to be more invasive species than other locations? Are harmful algal blooms (HAB) more frequent by your property? Do you use your property several times a year but never or seldom need to get your septic pumped? Do you mow right up to the edge of the lake and let the clippings go into the lake? Just some small things like this can have a big influence on the health of our lake. It is everyone's responsibility to monitor their actions before we point a finger at someone else.

***"AS PROPERTY OWNERS ON MELODY LAKE, WE HAVE THE OBLIGATION TO ALTER OUR WAY OF LIFE TO PROTECT MELODY LAKE, RATHER THAN TO ALTER MELODY LAKE TO PROTECT OUR WAY OF LIFE"*** – Bob Rosati

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## The "Melody Makers" of Melody Lake – by Bob Rosati

After coming home from the US Army and deciding to move full time to Melody Lake, I used to enjoy sitting around talking to some of the "old timers" from the Willet area, wanting to hear the stories about growing up in "small time" USA. At that time, the Melody Lake property owners weren't too welcoming with the elders in Willet. It seems that back in the good ol' days, Melody Lake was owned by a single family and all Willet residents were welcome to use the lake for swimming, and fishing. I remember, quite often, one old timer, John Gofgowski (now deceased) would talk about how it was now that close to 100 property owners had exclusive use of the lake and the Willet natives were no longer welcome. I remember once asking why on the highway maps, the lake was listed as "Ellis Pond" and other maps listed it as Melody Lake. He told me the story about how when the lake was privately owned, the property on the far side of the dam was owned by the Dillenbeck family from Whitney Point. The family also had a musical talented family (known as the "Melody Makers" that would practice at the lake and allow the Willet residents to come and enjoy the Christian music. More on this story later in this newsletter.

## **2025 Meeting Summary**

2025 meeting participation was about the same as 2024 with approximately 25% of the membership in attendance. If you have not been to a meeting in a long time, we encourage your participation. We realize that members would like to enjoy the lake and their homes during the summer, therefore, we are always striving to keep meetings to one hour, unless we are unable to cover all important topics in that timeframe. We also attempt to keep the sessions friendly, courteous while allowing members' voices to be heard. Below are "some" (not all) of the key topics discussed.

### **June meeting:**

- Renewing our current Certificate of Deposit
- Ensuring that the Board has correct contact information for each member
- Update of Bylaws Committee
- Election of Board members
- Status of Melody Lane
- CSLAP Report
- Dam report
- NYSFOLA Conference
- Cortland County Soil and Water (milfoil discussion)
- Pavilion update
- MLA Newsletter (1<sup>st</sup> place again this year)
- MLA Picnic

### **July meeting:**

- Update on Bylaws Committee
- Nominations for Board of Directors
- Status of Melody Lane
- CSLAP water testing
- Dam status
- NYSFOLA Conference
- Cortland County Soil and Water (milfoil discussion)
- Pavilion status
- Picnic

### **August meeting:**

- Update of Bylaws
- Pavilion fund (are members still interested in this)
- Melody Lane Speed Bumps
- CSLAP water samples (3 of 4 were completed)
- MLA Newsletter – we asked for member participation in writing articles they felt useful.
- Boater Safety
- Dam Status (leakage, what maintenance needs to be done before winter)
- Status of the MLA picnic – this was a great success but we would still like to see more members attend to enjoy some great food, socialize and have a bit of fun.
- September meeting – Majority of members stated this is not necessary. Three meetings a year was sufficient.

## **SO, WHAT'S COMING UP IN 2026 FOR DISCUSSION???**

- Date of Family Picnic
- Review of the Dam Emergency Action Plan (EAP)
- Review of the Dam Inspection and Maintenance Plan (I&M)
- Duties of association officers and committee members
- Continue to deal with invasives species and other lake concerns
- Possible Dues increase
- Summer events to bring our members together

Several members expressed concern over the condition of our lake to me last Summer and Fall. One member was very critical of the board because we did not have a comprehensive plan to address the milfoil in the lake and that we did not rush into using the chemical, florpyrauxifen-benzyl, (FPB). My reply was that I, the board members, and all of the members I had spoken to were not in favor of putting chemicals in the lake. He replied that it was ridiculous and that the chemical is safe and has a half-life of only 2 days. My response to that is that most chemicals are sold as safe by their manufacturers until they are proven unsafe. In many cases irreparable harm is already done. The article copied below confirms my fears stating that the chemical does have a short life in the water. It has, however, been found in the sediment at the bottom of the lake over a year later. In a shallow lake like ours, that could be a disaster.

### **What's Really Happening Beneath the Water? By VP Bob Eastman**

As harvesters are pulled from the water and this year's maintenance totals come in, another important piece of the lake management conversation is emerging: What happens when herbicides linger longer than expected? A new study from the Lake George Association in New York found that Florpyrauxifen-benzyl (FPB), an aquatic herbicide often promoted as fast-degrading, behaves differently in the real world than in controlled lab studies.



Researchers discovered that while FPB quickly disappears from the water column, it can persist in lakebed sediments for more than a year. These findings raise new questions about long-term ecological impacts, especially with repeated applications and the potential for buildup over time. It's a reminder that managing aquatic vegetation isn't just about what we remove today but also understanding how each method - mechanical or chemical - shapes the health of our lakes for seasons to come.

We are on the waiting list for the Cortland County Soil & Water Conservation District's weed harvester to clean up our lake. There is a concern that we need a better location to launch the boat and we are working to address that concern. We are, along with Sara and Mary Jo, exploring many options to address the problems on our lake, but will not rush to any solution until we are convinced that it is safe.

#### **Additional Information:**

[www.Valleycentral.com](http://www.Valleycentral.com) - Lake George Association's New Study Reveals Herbicide Persistence in Environment

[www.Biorxiv.org](http://www.Biorxiv.org) - Persistence of florpyrauxifen-benzyl in sediments following application to a large oligotrophic lake to control Eurasian watermilfoil

## **LATEST ON THE DAM – by VP Bob Eastman**

There are a few members that seem to think that our dam is not maintained properly and seem to be trying to convince other members, as well as the DEC engineers and our Professional Engineer that this is true. Our dam undergoes an engineering assessment every 10 years as well as a detailed dam safety inspection every 2-3 years by our hired Professional Engineer and is inspected by Professional Engineers from the DEC every 2 years. We (Scott Harris, Bob Rosati, and I) have taken care of all of the concerns that they raise on each inspection. They are always minor issues like repairing concrete, trimming brush, adding stones to baskets, etc. At each of the DEC inspections that I have been at, the DEC Engineers commend us and thank us for being so responsive to their concerns and requests. As far as the seepage, they say, it looks the same, no sediment, etc., continue to monitor it. They have stated several times that there is no accurate way to measure the seepage. Members that have been here since the 1960's have repeatedly stated that the lake has been as low as it was this past summer many times in the past, and have photos as proof. All of the lakes that I saw, as well as the Susquehanna and Chenango Rivers, had extremely low water levels over last Summer. The paragraph below is copied from the September 2007 Melody Lake Newsletter....

***“Connie reported that a concerned citizen questioned the safety of the dam with the DEC. Several association members met with the concerned person and the DEC representative at the dam on August 24, at 1 1:00 am. The concern centered on the seepage under the dam and the safety of people that might be in the creek downstream. The DEC representative stated the dam has been inspected at required intervals and previous reports recorded the seepage and it is not any worse than previously recorded. Unexpected increases in the seepage might give rise to concern but it appears to be consistent over time.”***

This seepage could start at almost any place in the lake and travel along the bedrock to the exit of least resistance. There are numerous underground springs that feed the lake. There are also springs on the downside of the dam. It has also been mentioned that some seepage can act as a relief valve, relieving pressure on the dam, much like the stone walls in Pennsylvania that have stood for 150-200 years, intentionally built with gaps between the stones. Our dam is made of laid up stone and will always have some seepage.

Our dam is classified as a “class C high hazard dam” This classification is given because of the risk of loss of life in the trailer park and properties in Willet below us if the dam were to fail. It has absolutely nothing to do with the condition of the dam. It is imperative that we maintain our dam because if it was ever condemned, the chances of DEC permitting a new one are very, very slim.

For a history of the 1980 redesign and rebuilding of our dam, completed by volunteer members see our website at <https://www.stny.info/melodylake/>, The power point presentation is titled “Dam Repair History”. Our dam, our lake, and our association continues to be in pretty good shape and will continue as long as we work together addressing our concerns rather than forming little groups to work against each other.

## MLA Dues – Proposed Increase for 2027 – by Kelly Cerroni, Association Secretary

As you may be aware, our MLA dues have not increased since 2009 (16 years). With careful budgeting and spending, we were able to keep the dues at \$100. Below is a status of when our dues were increased and what the increase was.

2003 - \$30

2004 - \$35

2005 - \$40

2006 - \$60

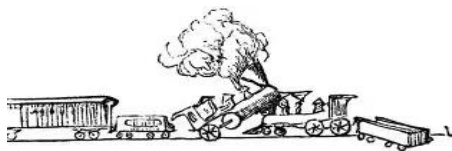
2007 - \$60

2008 - \$60

2009 to 2026 - \$100. At the August 10, 2008 meeting, a motion was made by a member to increase the dues from \$60 to \$100 beginning in 2009. The goal was to allow MLA to meet increasing operating and maintenance costs. The motion was 2<sup>nd</sup> and accepted by the membership.

We believe it is now time to raise the dues by \$50 per year (increasing from \$100 to \$150) beginning in 2027. Inflation and rising costs, insurance premiums, lake/road/dam maintenance all need ongoing upkeep that must be funded. Other costs may include water quality testing, weed control, shoreline restoration, etc. A well-maintained lake allows us to fully embrace the lake lifestyle and it also has a direct impact on our property values.

The plan is to discuss this proposed increase at the July MLA meeting in 2026. We will include this in the agenda for that meeting and will send the agenda via email prior to the meeting. Be sure to check your email regularly. Also, please try to keep an hour free on your calendar to attend this meeting. Thank you !



### Being a Board Member –

We're not allowed to run the train, the whistle we cannot blow  
We're not allowed to designate how fast the train should go  
We're not allowed to let off steam, or even ring the bell  
But if the train should jump the track  
Let's see who catches hell.

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### 1937 The Melody Makers from Whitney Point

Ray Dillenbeck and his wife ran a greenhouse and were florists in WP. Their children played music in churches from Maine to Florida to the delight of the congregations. The group played for some years. It appears the group started performing at the end of 1935. This is a 1937 shot when they were all still young. 10-year-old Alice is on the left. 13-year old Lowell on the xylophone. 4-year old Sylvia was the conductor in the middle front. 11-year old Louis is with the accordion. 7-year old Sonny (Ray Jr.) is on the drums. People loved watching Sylvia step up on a wood box and conduct the music even when she was only two when she started. They were performing as a group until at least the early 1950s. Some will remember Sonny Dillenbeck who ran a florist business in Johnson City for many years.



“We abuse land and water because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land and water as a community to which we belong, we may then begin to use it with love and respect” .....Aldo Leopold

### **A Call to Action: Restoring our Lake Health – Sara Warner & MaryJo Watts**

Our beautiful lake had a very tough year in 2025: the return of Eurasian milfoil clogging swim areas and making boating impossible; the introduction of another invasive, starry stonewort (alas, that's not the name of a 70s glam rock band); more mystery snails littering our beaches with their putrid stench; and increasing numbers of harmful algal blooms. There's also tree blight, stressed riparian barriers, ditch/drainage issues, and leaking holding tanks to contend with. We are not alone. In the Finger Lakes water health emergencies set records in [2024](#) and [2025](#). Across the globe, higher temperatures, droughts, decreased winter ice, chemical-laden runoffs, and atmospheric rivers (intense rainstorms) are degrading habitats and altering water levels. All of these factors impact recreational use and property values.

Ecosystems are fragile and complex, as are the humans who care for them. Righting our lake will be most effective if we look simultaneously at our individual and collective practices, consider our watershed, and buffer our shorelines. The key is to tackle these issues holistically, and together. No singular action - not the reintroduction of grass carp (which in hindsight decimated native plant populations, giving invasives an edge) nor a reliance on chemical treatments (e.g., Procelecor) - can heal our lake, not in the short term, and certainly not as a sustainable strategy for the future. No single person or group can save us. What can and will work is a collective commitment to a comprehensive plan that takes all factors into consideration. We can rebalance the ecology of our lake. It will take time, some cash, and a commitment of the membership, but we got this!

The intrepid community of Melody Lake has already begun to address these issues head on, and there will be ample opportunities for collective collaboration this coming summer. We've got a wealth of imagination, talent, and grit. Many of you have been here for generations and have a treasure trove of experience. We want to honor and build upon that knowledge. Let's hear your voices and ideas.

Taking the unique needs of our water body into consideration, Mary Jo Watts and Sara Warner have drafted a 5-year action plan to remediate and restore Melody Lake. They circulated that document on our MLA Facebook page. It is also attached to this newsletter. Many people have offered comments and suggestions. We'd love to hear more. Let's bring our collective wisdom to the creation of a viable action plan.

We are compiling a list of resources, fact sheets, best practices, suggestions for task forces, and sign-up sheets. We need your ideas, your volunteer labor, and your skills. Who wants to work on budgets? On negotiating prices for plants/trees, on building water gardens, on digging a snail pit? Who is bringing the adult beverages to the community workdays?!

### **Join the MLA Garden Club**

As you drive around the lake, you'll notice a new **rain garden** in the shared space next to the Turners' property. With less than a week of conversation and planning a group of folks installed this bed to help with road run-off. The ad hoc "MLA garden club" will meet monthly, starting in May, to install more beds, bushes and trees in the field and around the community property. We welcome any and all members to join us. A huge thanks to Bill Matola, Jennifer and Glen Ackerman, Lori and Jim Giglio, Anne and Jeff Corey, Judy Natoli, Doris Wilbur, Mary Jo Watts, and Sara Warner for jump-starting this effort. The MLA Garden Club Installs a Rain Garden in Aug 2025.

We are also interested in creating some [floating wetland gardens](#). This is an inexpensive and beautiful way to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen pollution from road, septic, and agricultural runoff, which has proven effective in reducing algal blooms. According to the engineers at Princeton Hydro, each 250-square foot floating garden can remove 10 lbs of phosphorus annually. These beds also foster healthy microbial and plankton communities, creating habitats for fish.

### **Bears...Oh My!**

American black bears visited Melody Lake in May and June of last year, helping themselves to bird feeders on several properties and scaring the daylights out of one year-round resident, who opened her curtain to see the hungry creature on her back porch, with only a glass door separating them. Bear sightings are not uncommon in Cortland County, typically between March and May when they emerge from hibernation. Our furry friends tend to be most active in the early mornings or late evenings. Black bears have a natural fear of humans, though they can become defensive if surprised or approached, and they are emboldened by human food sources. The DEC recommends that people keep tight lids on their garbage and recycle bins, avoid feeding pets outdoors, and clean their grills after each use to avoid temptation. If there's a bear sighting in the area, remove your bird feeders, bring your pets indoors, and notify your neighbors.

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*When you purchased your property, you took a silent oath to live up to this mission statement. Through your deed you also agreed to accept the bylaws, rules and regulations adopted or hereby adopted by the Melody Lake Association. When you accept a position on the association board you go one step further. You should be able to put aside friendships, differences, personal gain etc. and base your decisions on current or future impacts to the lake or other property owned by the association.*

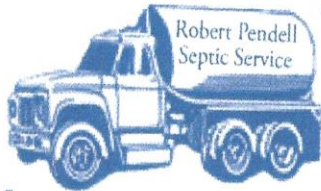
**THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS HELP TO MAKE THIS NEWSLETTER POSSIBLE**

**LET'S SUPPORT THEM IN RETURN**

These same sponsors have supported us for years. Members Bob and Andrea Eastman have been major sponsors of this newsletter with **Eastman Studio & Gallery** and **C&E Electronic Display**. Want to help the health of the lake? Contact Bob @ **Robert Pendell Septic Service**. Bob is seen around the lake year-round. This guy really knows his.....STUFF. Expecting some company? Make sure you have some "adult cocktails" available from **The Point Wine and Spirits** in Whitney Point. Last but not least is the **Cincinnatus Home Center** or what I like to call the "Cincinnatus Mall". Nowhere else can you find lumber, hardware, paint, beer, freshly made subs, groceries, and more all under one roof. Owner Bill Cobb, daughter Kristin, son Mark and staff have always supported us in more ways than this newsletter. Most association meetings and every association family picnics includes a donated item from Bill which brings several \$\$\$ into our available funds. We also have some new sponsors such as the "**Rocky Road Express**" located at the center of downtown Willet. They even offer a 10% discount to all association members with a copy of the ad from this newsletter. Please support these sponsors whenever you can and let them know you saw their ad in the *Melody Lake Newsletter*.



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★ ★ WELCOME MELODY LAKE ASSOCIATION GUESTS! ★ ★



# ROCKY ROAD EXPRESS

## Rocky Road Express

*Your One Stop for Delicious, Fast & Fresh Food + Ice Cream!*

Whether you're visiting for the weekend or enjoying lake life all season long, we've got something for everyone — hearty sandwiches, comfort food favorites, kids meals, and our famous soft-serve treats.

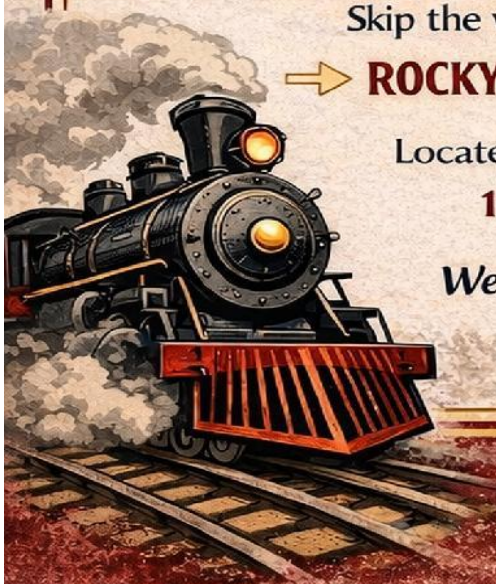
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