

Best of OKLAHOMA Living 2012

By Cindy Downes

Betty Wilhite, a Cookson Electric Cooperative member, is one of many who voted Lake Tenkiller as “Best Lake” in this year’s Best of Oklahoma Living contest.

“When our children were growing up,” Wilhite said, “we took them to Disneyland, Knox Berry Farm, Branson, Hawaii, and Puerto Vallarta, but if you ask them today where they want to go on vacation, it’s Lake Tenkiller.”

Its clear waters and abundance of bass, trout, catfish, crappie and carp, make Lake Tenkiller the 16th best fishing destination in the nation, according to Field & Stream magazine. Ten marinas around the lake offer fuel, snacks, and repairs; and two of those offer heated docks for wintertime fishing.

Water sports abound. Besides pleasure boating, sailing, and jet skiing, there are swimming, wave running, canoeing, and kayaking. The unique scuba dive park features underwater attractions for divers to explore, including a sunken airplane fuselage and an old school bus.

For those who prefer land, there’s golf, duckpin bowling, bicycle rentals, playgrounds, volleyball, and basketball. Nearby Tahlequah offers shopping and movies.

Toast your friends with a homemade root beer or crunch down on a Fried Banana Split from Soda Steve’s. Savor the down-home cooking from the Cookson Cafe. These are just two of many unique dining experiences around the lake.

Nature lovers enjoy walking along the limestone cliffs or hiking in the nearby wildlife refuges to catch a glimpse of raccoons dousing fish and wild turkeys foraging acorns. Listen for the screech of bald eagles as they swoop across the lake and the grunts of white pelicans nesting in colonies.

Best Lake: Tenkiller



Lake Tenkiller in northeast Oklahoma offers a unique scuba dive park and many other attractions. Photo by Bill Downes

When the day is done, visitors will find Tenkiller State Park and Cherokee Landing State Park just around the corner for an overnight stay. Both parks offer bunkhouses, cabins, RV and tent campsites, rest rooms, showers, and a pool. There are also a variety of resorts, cabins, condos, bed and breakfasts, and hotels in the area.

“Lake Tenkiller has something for everyone,” Wilhite said. **OT**



By Cindy Downes

Billie Letts, voted “Best Author” by *Oklahoma Living* readers, is proof positive that you don’t need up-to-date technology to be successful. Billie taps out her award-winning stories on an old, electric typewriter.

Billie is best known for her book, *Where the Heart Is*, which was selected for Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club in December 1998. The book was published in 14 countries and sold 3 million copies. In 2000, the film version was released starring Natalie Portman, Ashley Judd, and Stockard Channing.

“I didn’t seriously intend to write a book,” Letts said.

The original manuscript was a short story. However, not only has she written *Where The Heart Is*, she has also written four screenplays, numerous short stories, and three other novels: *The Honk and Holler Opening Soon*, *Shoot the Moon*, and her latest, *Made in the U.S.A.*

The main characters in Letts’ books are mostly poorly educated, depressed, and non-traditional families.

“My greatest hope is that my stories might lead readers to greater acceptance, tolerance, and compassion for one another,” she said.

She receives hundreds of letters each year from women like Novalee, the heroine of *Where the Heart Is*. These women tell their tragic life stories and then share how Letts’ books inspired them to return to school.

“I cry every time I read one of those letters,” Letts said.

A native Tulsan, Letts is a retired instructor of English and the mother of three sons: Dana, Shawn, and Tracy. Dennis, her husband of fifty years, died in 2008.

After Dennis passed away, her writing stopped. She had lost her muse. Her fans will be glad to know, however, that Letts has finally begun a new novel set in contemporary Oklahoma.

Letts has won several awards including the Walker Percy Literary Award in 1994, the Oklahoma Book Award for fiction in both 1996 and 1999, and, most recently, the International Matrix Award in 2011. **OT**

Best Author: Billie Letts

Billie Letts is author of the best seller, *Where the Heart Is*.

Courtesy photo

