

Innkeeper

of the year 2007



BY MARY HUGHES

Innkeepers Jim and Donna Lacey standing on the elegant staircase at the Blomidon Inn, Wolfville, NS.

Farmer Turned Innkeeper

“If anyone told me 30 years ago that I would be living in Nova Scotia and owning an Inn, I would have told them they were crazy,” laughs Jim Lacey.

To meet and talk with Jim, I see that he is one of the happiest and most optimistic innkeepers I have ever met. He doesn't complain. He is passionate about his life, his career and his family.

Turn back the clock to when Jim and Donna Lacey and their 5 young children farmed in Central Ontario. Jim, who was also a manufacturing executive with Thomas J. Lipton Ltd, was offered a job in Nova Scotia and moved his entire family to a new life. They bought an oceanfront bed and breakfast along the shore of Nova Scotia's Northumberland Strait as their family home. With a 180-metre beach just a short walk away, 8 hectares of lawns, gardens, meadows and a pond it is easy to see why they chose it. The Lacey's operated part of the home as a B&B and also purchased a small diner nearby. Jim worked at his new job with LifeSaver's Inc and in his time off worked with Donna. Jim just had one request as they ventured down the entrepreneurial path:

please don't lose too much money! As time went on, the small diner was not a sound investment and they sold it a few years later.

The Amherst Shore Country Inn was doing well and the Lacey's chose to purchase the Blomidon Inn in Wolfville. A Victorian Inn with a formal dining room and 29 rooms, their second venture was a bigger and very different property from their first.

At that time Canada Select (an accommodation grading system) evaluated the Blomidon with one of the poorest ratings in the province. Yet at the same time, Nova Scotia Tourism was bringing customers to the inn showcasing it as one of the best in the province. Jim was frustrated because he knew the inn was worthy of more than what it was receiving. Nearby bed and breakfasts with fewer amenities were getting higher ratings than the Blomidon Inn. How could this be happening?



Amherst Shore Country Inn

Jim started to get more involved with tourism agencies because he wanted Inns such as his to be recognized as important contributors to tourism and not to be overlooked.

Both Donna and Jim were instrumental in starting Unique Inns of Nova Scotia. This organization consists of inns and bed and breakfasts that adhere to higher standards of hospitality. Today, Jim still sees dealing with government and tourism as the biggest challenge of his business. Nowadays, the Blomidon Inn now receives a much higher rating of 4 stars out of 5.

As the children grew, so did the businesses. While Donna managed the Amherst Country Shore Inn, Jim managed the Blomidon Inn three hours away. Jim laughs as he recalls, "guests thought we were saving our marriage by working apart from each other." The children were involved in working at both inns. Jim and Donna always made their enterprise a family business. Today, son Michael works as the manager and Certified Sommelier at the Blomidon, Sean is the chef at the inn, and son Rob with his wife Mary manage the Amherst Shore Country Inn.

Jim and Donna are busy with their other projects that include a large gift shop on the Blomidon property. It keeps them shopping and travelling all over North America for two months of the year. As Jim admits, "Innkeeping is a hard business. You have to always be there 24/7. We worked through summers. We never had holidays when others were on vacation. We had to be here and open. We always managed to have an off-season vacation and took the entire family." When I asked Jim if he missed farming he replied, "The difference between farming and innkeeping is what I always tell people- how many cows have called you at 3 a.m.?"

