

Home away from home

WATERLOO CHRONICLE

Local bed and breakfasts offer 'personal flavour' to visitors

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With the technology industry exploding in the region over the past decade, Waterloo has become an important destination for many business travellers.

And while a hotel can be convenient for a quick stopover to RIM Park or a conference at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, a couple of days in a sterile, lonely environment can be hard on the soul — and the wallet.

At least that's what Sandi Marques is hoping. Marques, a Cambridge native and renowned wine expert, has opened a new bed and breakfast with her husband David in the centre of the city, minutes from the business park in a quiet suburb off of Albert Street.

"A lot of people like to come for an extended stay. They like the extra attention," David said. "It's more of a home."

A bed and breakfast can also stave off the loneliness that often besets business people when they are away from their loved ones.

"They get to interact with a family and if you don't know anyone in town, at least here you have someone to talk to," Sandi said.

The Marques opened their bed and breakfast, called the Sugarbush Guest House, in September and have seen a steady stream of clients.

Many have been people in town for business conferences, but they've also seen parents of university students, members of hockey teams and visiting university professors.

"It's been sort of a mixed bag but we've been booked solid," Sandi said.



Sandi Marques, an internationally renowned wine taster and appraiser, runs the Sugarbush Guest House in Waterloo. The Sugarbush Guest House offers wine tasting and mixology classes in a cosy environment. Bed and breakfasts have quickly become a popular temporary accommodation for business travellers in the region.

GREG MACDONALD PHOTO

She admitted to being surprised by the variety and calibre of guests that have stayed at Sugarbush.

"We've had people come in for the full-length animation festival, Oktoberfest, business conferences, everything," Sandi said.

It's a big change from the city she remembers from when she was growing up.

"When I left Cambridge in 1991, Waterloo was very small time," she said. "But now, it's almost big time."

Her husband is quick to correct her.

"It is big time," David said.

The Sugarbush Guest House features four cosy rooms for weary travellers, which range in price

from \$70-\$85 per night, with discounts for long-term stays.

The Maple Room and Angelic Room are bright and crisp, while the Siesta Room features a Mexican theme perfect for a mid-afternoon power nap.

The largest room is called the Sugar Shack, a cosy cabin-like room designed for month-long

stays. The shack features a private bathroom and a separate entrance.

"We get a few jokes about the name," Sandi admitted. "You wouldn't believe the stuff I hear."

While business has already been solid, the Marques hope to expand their clientele by opening a fitness room in the new year and offering wine-tasting classes in February.

"People will learn anything and everything to do with wine and other alcoholic beverages," she said.

Sandi, a member of the International Sommelier Guild, is a noted wine expert and one of the country's few wine appraisers. She hopes her expertise will help distinguish Sugarbush from the 27 other bed and breakfasts in Waterloo Region.

Bed and breakfasts are a booming industry in the region, said Marianne Guistini, vice-president of the Waterloo Region Bed and Breakfast Association.

"We offer home away from homes," Guistini said. "We offer a personal flavour that hotels can't."

While St. Jacobs and Stratford are natural communities for bed and breakfasts, with popular markets and festivals, the Waterloo clientele is usually in town for more practical purposes, mainly business meetings and conferences.

Business people often prefer bed and breakfasts because they offer a more relaxed and intimate start to the day, Guistini said.

"What can I say, businessmen like to get up and have a nice breakfast," she said.

For more information about the Sugarbush Guest House or any of the region's bed and breakfasts call 519-634-1170 or visit www.bbwaterlooregion.ca.