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Inner Joy
Inverhaugh couple opens unique bed and breakfast getaway

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DANBY CEO JIM ESTILL
Receives national recognition

BIG OPENINGS
Canadian Tire and Broadline in Mount Forest



Inverhaugh couple looking to help people find their inner joy

BY JAIME MYSLIK

INVERHAUGH – Running water, singing birds and swishing trees are all key elements to Inner Joy Getaways' goal of offering guests whatever they need for their own inner joy.

"That could be a spectrum of things to different people," said owner Laura Feenstra. "So what can we do to give you the base so that you can find your joy, wherever it may be."

Laura and her husband Will Feenstra have opened Inner Joy Getaways, a unique bed and breakfast located in Inverhaugh on the site of a private cricket pitch.

The idea stemmed from an unlikely source: shipping containers.

However, the unique getaway was not their primary focus or reason for purchasing the land, it was a by-product of their life journey.

Will is a youth counsellor and would like to offer different types of counselling, for both youths and adults, on the site.

"The first time we came here [Will] had been in the hospital with a teen for suicide and anxiety," Laura said.

"That morning the mom called and said 'would you take my son for the day?' and that's when we were coming to see this place, so we were like 'sure'.

"We brought him and we just watched how when he and I stood by the water he started to come alive."

Will already knows the room he would like to use for counselling services: a sunroom off the side of the house.

"The sunlight that is here is incredible for people that are struggling with anxiety," he said.

When the couple first looked at the property, it was way out of their price range and they considered converting it to a wedding venue so they could pay for the property and still offer counselling.

However, they couldn't get permission from Centre Wellington Township without paying high costs for studies and other necessary requirements.

So Laura started looking for alternative funding streams and she stumbled upon tiny houses built out of shipping containers.

She sent a photograph to Will.

"I remember getting that picture and going 'how far out of the box did you go?' Will said. "Really, she was thinking in the box.

"Neither one of us had ever really dreamed of doing anything with shipping containers."

They got the approvals from the township and ran with it.

"So we used all the equity that came out of our house, every penny and then some, to start this up," Will said.

"The idea is that the containers, basically the business runs and pays for the property, mortgage, taxes so that we can continue to do what we want to do with youth."

Laura said that passion for working with youth is really the driving factor behind the business.

"So spilling from youth into couples ... couples need to find their own peaceful spot and rejuvenate and that kind of thing because it's hard," she said.

Laura and Will have now jumped into the business with both feet.

"We joke a lot that we're God's favourite snow globe," Laura said. "Whenever life kind of seems to settle, he gives us a good shake and we're like 'ah.' It's been 18 years of that.

"I'm excited because I can see it really doing well, but terrified because it's so unknown."

Inner Joy Getaways opened in mid-June and has four shipping containers, all painted blue and located at the back of the property on the bank of the Grand River.

The containers themselves were only used once and are CSA approved. They are insulated and placed on concrete bases with plumbing, hydro and equipped with wifi and cell boosters.



ST. JACOBS SUITE SITTING AREA

Each of container is individually-themed as either Fergus, Elora, Elmira or St. Jacobs.

The containers themselves are about seven feet wide and 40 feet long, with a private 12-by-40 stamped concrete patio. Each unit has its own hot tub and barbecue.

The site also offers outdoor tennis and six chip and putt golf holes.

"The hot tubs are beautiful," Laura said. "They have a waterfall.

"They seat five people so if you have ... if you've rented out two as a group or two couples you can each go and sit in one or the other and have a glass of wine and relax."

The patios are separated by tall grass, fences and trees.

"These are high-end suites," Laura said. "They are going to have a full pots and pans set and kitchen. Like everything's in there (but) not the stove ... because that's against code for short-term rental.

"So it has portable induction cooktops."

Will said that everything in the suites is unique ... because the tight confines ensure it has to be.

"The whole works had to be thought outside the box," he said. "You can't just say, 'okay shipping container, we're done now make it look like a house;' no, because there isn't the space for a big monster fridge.

"There isn't space for a big stove."

In fact, even the furniture and fixtures had to be re-sized and the space needed to be considered.

"The furniture had to be really narrow, so we're not doing a kitchen table, we're doing a bar top which is kind of in the window a little bit and it's up higher and it takes up less space, so everything had to be rethought."

> "We really felt that this was called upon for us to do this. There's just so many doors that opened."
>
> - WILL FEENSTRA, OWNER, INNER JOY GETAWAYS



ELMIRA SUITE BEDROOM

Instead of a traditional bed and breakfast, where breakfast is offered between certain times in the morning, Will and Laura chose to allow guests to make their own food.

That way the experience is not constrained to any timeline and guests can enjoy whatever pace they choose.

"Every [room] will have its welcome package when you come so it will have a bottle of wine and then Belgian waffles that you can put in the toaster, fresh fruit to go with it, maple syrup, fresh croissants and stuff like that," Laura said.

"And then the chocolates or the peanuts if it's from Elmira suite because they have the peanuts.

"That kind of thing, so there'll be food in there in case you don't have time to go to the grocery store for the morning, there's something you can have."

The Feenstras have also chosen to feature local businesses in each of the rooms as well. Their goal is to put together a booklet to give guests an idea of where they can go in the local community for various activities like fine dining, coffee shops, grocery stores, etc.

"We're trying to build relationships locally," Will said. "Then they also get a bit of a picture as to why we're doing this."

As Inner Joy Getaways just opened the vacancy rate is still unknown - and Laura said that is quite nerve-racking. Especially since the couple has had to overcome a number of hurtles along the way.

"You have to laugh, you have to keep going," Will said. "I think for us, we've also had to go back to our purpose.

"We really felt that this was called upon for us to do this. There's just so many doors that opened."

Both Will and Laura also said that once the decision is made to start a business, it's important to give it everything to get your best shot.

"Keep reminding yourself why you're all in," Laura said.

"Because you're going to get ... knocked around a lot and discouraged and just keep going because you know that there was a reason why you had the dream to begin with and keep going."

The couple also said it's important for owners to surround themselves with people they trust, because a lot of people will be negative about a new endeavour. However, they also said it's important to admit when there's things that require outside help.

"We have our strengths but we also have our weaknesses," Will said.

"And we realize that for our weaknesses we hire people."

The grand opening was held on June 19 and the official opening for guest bookings took place on June 21.

Laura said the bed and breakfast is targeted at people looking for a relaxing weekend, like couples who are looking to get away or friends who are looking to reconnect, or those looking to enjoy some fly fishing on the Grand River.

For more information visit https://www.innerjoygetaways.com.

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PHOTOS: BY JAIME MYSLIK