

On The Inside

July / August 2004

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Looking Out

Newsletter of the Michigan Lake to Lake Bed & Breakfast Association

Letter From The President



Dear Friends:

I hope that all members are having a profitable summer season. For the majority of M L2L members, this is a time of non-stop guests, continuous laundry, numerous trips to the grocery store and the farmer's market, and not enough sleep. But we LOVE it!

In this issue of the newsletter, you will find marketing tips, association information, insurance savings news, annual conference info, and additional useful hints for operating a successful B&B, as well as a new occupancy reporting program developed by Michigan State University. I am pleased to have other members contributing articles; sharing their expertise with the whole membership. Printed in this issue are just a few of the benefits of membership in Michigan Lake to Lake.

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Membership in Michigan Lake to Lake provides each member with more than just a website listing and a picture in the print directory. Membership encompasses a spirit of camaraderie. Membership opens up the possibility of networking with peers; continuing education opportunities; referrals from around the state; an assurance to the guest of a safe environment due to our inspection program; ongoing relationship with Michigan State University; access to money-saving programs and so much more. Most of these benefits are only available to members.

I have gained a great deal, both personally and professionally, by being a member of the Michigan Lake to Lake B&B Association. I appreciate knowing that my B&B is part of an association that is looking to the future to help create a favorable environment for this industry. In the years to come, both B&B members and the inn-going public will benefit from a strong Association. The Association needs your continued involvement. Later this summer when you receive your renewal invoice, reflect on where you would be *without* the Michigan Lake to Lake B&B Association. As American Express marketing states, "membership has its rewards."

Cathy Russell

President , Michigan Lake to Lake B&B Association

True Tales of a New Innkeeper

Pat Materka, Ann Arbor B&B

The summer after I graduated from high school, my mother gave me two choices. Either I could get a job, or I could stay home and she would teach me how to do housework.

This thinly veiled threat was all the incentive I needed. Within the week, I was selling newspaper subscriptions door to door. It certainly beat dusting.

So, I never did learn to be a competent housekeeper, and for 60 years this gap in my education and lack of knowledge has served me well. Friends overlooked the clutter; family members understood if a newspaper left on the couch offended them, they could certainly pick it up.

Instead of seeking perfection, I lowered my standards.

Until now.

Now our home is a B&B, and we all know that in this profession, you have to be fastidious. Or – and this is my solution – you hire someone who is.

How do you go about hiring a housekeeper? Using our Lake to Lake Forum, I asked other innkeepers about their experiences with housekeeping staff. They ranged from neutral to nightmarish. Elaine (Yelton Manor) calls it “the most complex and difficult aspect of running the inn. Hiring, scheduling, training and managing the esprit de corp of this staff (five off-season and eight or nine in-season) is very challenging.” While some workers are good, many others have been slow to learn, late or no-shows, or generally incompetent. Some stay long enough to show proof of employment (so they can get government assistance) and then never return.

“One came in this morning wearing a t-shirt that said in huge bold letters “Don’t Know, Don’t Care” Elaine added. “I told her not to wear it to work, as it (kind of?) does not represent the views of management!”

“I WILL NEVER DO IT!” declares Wendy Keene (Applesauce Inn). “During 15 years of hotel management, the majority of my frustrations during my adult life have been employee-related. If the time ever comes when we have to hire staff, I’ll sell first!”

Cathy Russell (White Swan Inn) and Angela Carrier (Carriage House Inn) report more positive experiences, and attribute this to finding employees through word of mouth. This is more easily accomplished in smaller inns like White Swan than 17-room Yelton Manor. Here are some more tips from this unscientific survey and my own experience:

- Be selective. Housekeeping staff will be in your life a lot, and on busy days you’ll be working along side them. Be prepared to listen to their complaints and problems.
- Employ two or more part-time staff rather than one full time, so that you’re not left in the lurch when one calls in sick or schedules a two-week vacation.
- Engage their input on the brands of cleaning supplies they prefer. Look for new tools and products that make their work easier.
- Emphasize excellence over speed. “I would rather have a new employee take her time and be thorough so that I don’t have to come back later and check things,” Cathy points out. That being said:
- Have a checklist for each room, and always make a final inspection yourself. Even the most conscientious staff may overlook a detail or two.
- Be generous with praise for work. Give the staff first dibs on linens or furniture that you’ve decided to replace and donate. Set aside snacks and sodas for them. Remember their birthdays and reward exceptional work with bonuses and gifts.

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MSU Occupancy Research

Dr. Ed Mahoney, Professor and Extension Specialist, Michigan State University

New this summer is an occupancy reporting program developed by MSU and funded by American Historic Inns. Michigan innkeepers along with innkeepers in Wisconsin, Alaska, California, and North Carolina are participating in a first-ever research program to track B&B occupancy. Each week on Sunday evening an email reminder is sent to registered participants to submit occupancy totals for the previous week and projected occupancy for the next week in the future. Then on Wednesday morning of that same week, the results along with comments on each state's totals are emailed to participants.

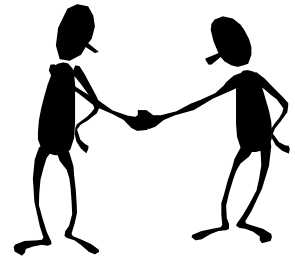
After six weeks of gathering weekly data, the numbers show that long weekends and the short vacation trends are the norm for B&B visitors. B&B/Inns with private baths have experienced a 15-40 % greater occupancy rate than those with shared baths. As the summer has progressed, more properties have experienced full occupancy from Friday through Sunday, with most inns having the capacity to accommodate more mid-week visitors. As a whole, Michigan inns are doing well when compared to other states. With more participants, Michigan could be set up to show regional occupancy in addition to the state-wide percentages.

If you are not already participating in this research program, you will have an opportunity to sign up this fall. Now that the program is up and running it will be expanded to other states in the fall. Michigan is pleased to be a part of the first wave. Thank you to all ML2L members currently participating in this research .

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Insurance Savings

Through our continued association relationship with Fremont Mutual Insurance and associate member Michael Burr of the Insurance Shop, ML2L members insured through Fremont Mutual will be receiving an increased discount upon renewing their policy. Effective July 1, 2004, Fremont Mutual will be automatically extending a 15% discount to all current insureds. Any other ML2L member who is interested in this program should contact Michael Burr at 800-350-6095 to discuss the insurance program and the benefits and discounts. Compared to other areas of the country, Michigan innkeepers are very fortunate to have an available and affordable insurance program. This is truly a membership benefit!



A man would do nothing if he waited until he could do it so well that no one could find fault.

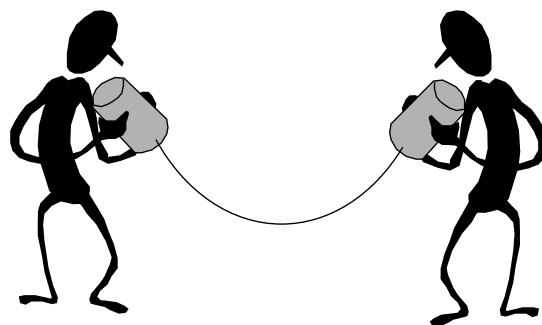
John Henry Cardinal Newman

Keeping Repeat Guests and Gaining New Referrals (cont.)

How do you get started e-mailing? If you use reservation software, you should already have a database of guests that includes e-mail addresses. If not, make sure you begin asking your guests for their e-mail address. (To insure participation, make sure to include your privacy policy, and never give those e-mail addresses to anyone..) You can then use a simple contact program like Microsoft Outlook to build your database.

Once you have your database, you will need a way to send out e-mails. We use an off the shelf program called Direct Mail. There is also a program from Microsoft, bCentral that works well too. Since many e-mail services are blocking spam, it is important to use a program that will send the e-mails one at a time instead of as a group. That way they will not look like spam to services like AOL and Yahoo and will have a much better chance of being delivered.

Content is the most important part of e-mail marketing. If your e-mails are fun to read and contain information your guests want to know, they will be read. You do not want to be considered junk e-mail, so make sure you have good content. We have changed the mix of our content over the years and found a mixture our guests seem to like. We include any upcoming specials and frequent guest discounts, special events that might bring guests to our area, a recipe from a favorite dish, and something personal about the inn. Our guests have favorable memories about their time Up North, so we like to give them another little taste to make them want to come back and visit us again.



The other key to getting your e-mail read is making sure you do not e-mail former guests too often. We found once a month is just about right. By touching your former customers once a month, you will keep your inn top of their minds if they are looking for a getaway or need lodging for other needs. It is a fine line to walk, not e-mailing too often, and it is always best to err on the side of caution. If you get complaints from your guests, rethink your content and your timing.

The other way we use e-mail is for targeted packages. We keep track of our guests who come to celebrate their birthday or anniversary. Then, the month before their special occasion, we send a special invitation to come back to celebrate offering a special package for their return visit. We have tremendous response from this technique. It makes it easy for guests to enjoy a special occasion.

By being diligent in gathering e-mail addresses and creating an e-mail newsletter that brings your inn to life each month for your guests, you can very cost effectively increase your repeat customers. Low cost, easy delivery, and quick turnaround make e-mail marketing something every B&B owner can use.

Next issue.... Using e-mail and your website to turn prospects into customers.

Diane owns the Inn At Crooked Lake in Petoskey and is the President of Radio One 2 One, a direct marketing firm that specializes in loyal customer marketing strategies. You can reach Diane at 231-439-9984 or at innatcrookedlake@aol.com.)

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**Don't forget our
newsletter deadline**

September 15, 2004!

Dues News

Jon Darrow, Board Treasurer, Saravilla B&B

The Board of Directors of the Michigan Lake to Lake Bed and Breakfast Association has approved a dues increase effective January 1, 2005. As is the case now, there will be two membership categories: **Basic Membership** and **Platinum Ambassador Membership**. There will be no change in the dues for Platinum Ambassador Members through December 31, 2007. They will continue to pay \$300 per year in addition to collecting \$1/night/room from their guests, which they will forward to ML2L on a monthly basis.

The Basic Membership dues will increase proportionately each of the next three years, until it reaches \$400/year in 2007. For 2005, the Basic Membership Dues will be \$330/year. The specific amount for 2006 has not yet been determined, but will approximate a 10% increase over the 2005 dues.

For several years, the Board of Directors has struggled with how to fund the many benefits and services ML2L provides its members.



Through a combination of identifying and implementing additional revenue sources and carefully monitoring expenditures, the Association has gotten by financially the last few years. Continued frugality, some additional expense reductions, and additional revenue increases, will allow ML2L to maintain its financial health and continue to be a force in promoting the entire bed & breakfast industry and individual member inns.

Distributing this newsletter via the internet instead of printing and mailing it will save ML2L about \$3,000 annually and is just one example of cost-cutting efforts undertaken by the Board of Directors to get the most value for the available dollars. Another example is the recent decision of the Board of Directors to **not produce a full print directory in 2005**. Instead, thousands more copies of a smaller pocket directory will be produced and widely distributed throughout Michigan and elsewhere. This attractive promotional piece will provide an updated listing of all ML2L members and provide appropriate contact information. By taking this action, ML2L will realize net expense reductions of approximately \$15,000 in the 2005 budget year, while at the same time, providing even more exposure for our member inns.

Selected cost reductions, a dues (our largest revenue source) increase, and continued frugality in all we do will permit ML2L to continue to be on the cutting edge in promoting our individual inns and the industry in general.

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2004 Conference Features Unique Venue

Angela Carrier, Board Vice President, Carriage House Inn

Just as all of our properties are unique, a unique location was sought and found for this year's Fall Meeting & Educational Conference. The 2004 Conference will be held at Brook Lodge in Augusta, Michigan. Close to Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, Brook Lodge is a full-service hotel and conference resort that owes its origins to Dr. W. E. Upjohn, founder of the Upjohn Company. This peaceful country retreat eventually became his preferred location for private and business entertaining. In 1956, 24 years after Dr. Upjohn's death, the Upjohn Company purchased Brook Lodge from the family estate and began its transformation into a full-service conference center for the exclusive use of Upjohn employees. Today, it is owned by Michigan State University as a full-service conference center. For more information on Brook Lodge, visit www.brooklodgemsu.com.

The conference will be held on a Monday and Tuesday, November 8 and 9. The conference will feature speakers in the insurance industry, online industry, and new marketing ideas and concepts. A silent auction and the popular round table discussions will return again. Watch your mail for additional conference and registration information or register through the form included in your newsletter. You can also visit www.laketolakemembers.com for updates.

Hope we'll see all of you there!

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Keeping Repeat Guests and Gaining New Referrals

Diane Hansell, Inn at Crooked Lake

Any business owner will tell you that repeat customers are the key to success. As a B&B owner, I know in our industry, repeat customers are our bread and butter. We can always count on those special guests to join us two or three times each year. Not only do those guests visit us frequently, but they are the same guests who refer other new guests to our inn. They are very valuable customers.



So when allocating our marketing money, we have found that marketing to those frequent customers is the best money we can spend. It is much easier to get a satisfied customer to come back to your inn than to entice a new guest to try your B&B. Marketing directly to those customers pays big dividends.

How can you do this without breaking the bank? We do use some direct mail in the form of postcards and newsletters two to three times per year. But the cheapest and easiest way to stay in touch with those customers is through e-mail. Not only is e-mail free, but you can send an e-mail out at anytime. Over 80% of our guests have e-mail addresses, and only a few have requested that we do not e-mail them information. Most of our guests *want* to know about our specials.

Welcome New Inns!

A Place in Thyme
Bob and Julie Krist
13140 Isthmus Road
Omena, MI 49674-0230
Phone: 231-386-7006
E-mail: bjkrist@traverse.net

Courtland Carriage House
Deanna Kindinger
303 South Courtland Street
Hart, MI 49420
Phone: 231-873-3871
E-mail: deanna@cchbb.com

Whispering Woods Bed & Breakfast
Jack and Nancy Hubbell
9547 Exeter Road
Carleton, MI 48117
Phone: 734-654-3111
E-mail: nancyhubbell@hotmail.com

For more information on our newest members,
check them out at www.laketolake.com.

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Inn Review Gift

The gift to inns being reviewed in 2004-2005 is a really cool travel mug with the ML2L logo on one side. If you are interested in purchasing mugs to have in your B&B, here's the direct source:

Adventures in Advertising, Michelle Pridna
99 Sinclair Drive, Suite 2, Muskegon MI 49441
Phone: 231-798-9560

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Editor's Choice Recipe

A gracious friend brought this in to work one day last week—still warm. And with Michigan...and the fresh blueberries still available...she made a lot of new friends that day. Delicious. Custard-y. And the blueberries get very plump!

Early Morning French Toast

1 Loaf French bread
8 oz. Cream cheese, room temperature
8 Eggs
¼ C Sugar
1 C Milk
2½ C Half & Half
1 T Vanilla
¼ C Maple Syrup
2-2½ C Blueberries

Streusel
½ C Flour
6 T Brown sugar
1 t Cinnamon
¼ C Butter

Butter a 9 x 13 pan. Slice bread ¾" thick and spread cream cheese over one side. Layer in pan cheese side up. Combine eggs, milk, half & half, sugar, vanilla, and maple syrup. Pour over top of bread. Refrigerate overnight.

Before baking, top with blueberries, then streusel.

Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes. Dust with powdered sugar before serving.

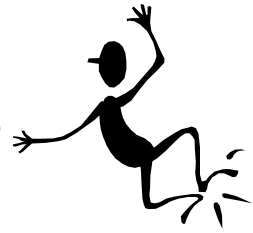
8-10 servings.

Ability is what you're capable of doing.
Motivation determines what you do.
Attitude determines *how well* you do it.

Lou Holtz

True Tales of a New Innkeeper (cont.)

While I value their skill and diligence, what I appreciate most in my house-keeping staff is their attitude. Since I dislike cleaning, it's been a revelation to find out some people enjoy it. They take justified pride in creating a spotless environment. And that's the number one service we offer our guests.



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**Don't forget our newsletter deadline
September 15, 2004!**

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