

YOUNG at HEART

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Getaways with a difference



Partners Ann Heggie and Bryan Schenk welcome visitors to the newly-renovated Noah's Inn in the pretty village of Neustadt.

By Rosemary Anderson

There comes that perfect summer morning when you wake up early and with your first cup of coffee decide to have a getaway day.

Living in the Guelph area is a bonus because there are so many lovely drives and destinations around us. Driving is enjoyable when there's little traffic on the two-lane highways and plenty of villages along the way to explore, browse your way along the main street or just stop for a cup of tea.

It's good to have a destination, but getting there is half the fun.

I've got three favourite drives to share –and because I love summer theatre productions, that's usually a highlight of my trips. But sometimes I just pick a place on the map and that can give the best surprise of all. That was the day I discovered Neustadt and heard the story of Noah's Inn.

Neustadt, which is German for new town, was founded in 1855 by David Winkler from Germany. There was an inn built in 1858 by German stonemasons, but after many owners, the building had been empty for a year when Bryan Schenk bought it in 2001.

"We saw an opportunity to revive this beautiful old building, provide employment and be of service to the community," says Schenk.

Schenk, who grew up on a nearby farm, remembers coming to the old hotel with his grandfather, Noah Schenk. Now he and his partner, Ann Heggie, are putting all their efforts in getting this hotel, renamed Noah's Inn in honour of his grandfather, back on the tourist map.

They have kept the original charm of the old fieldstone building with its deep window casements, but completely renovated and refurnished it with a new kitchen.

"Our food service is up and running with two chefs," says Schenk. "We've applied for a liquor licence and by the fall we hope to have the four ensuite rooms ready."

They opened for business on July 1 and already the dining room is popular with their neighbours. People drop in for latte and croissants in mid-morning, enjoy lunch and dinner there or come in for Sunday brunch from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Their families are involved too. Heggie's niece, Jacquelyne is house manager with her husband Michael Dinkel, pastry chef and kitchen manager. Dinkel's breads and pastries are often sold over the counter to diners, which is encouraging Schenk and Heggie to add a bakery to the operation. And Bryan's brother supplies the kitchen with shitake mushrooms from his farm.

"It's like a big family in town," says Bryan. He and Ann love the friendly, small-town feeling. Mill Street, which has most of the shops, is quiet early in the week, but the weekends are busy,

especially Sunday when the shops open at 10 a.m.

The village offers much to the visitor with several artists displaying at the Riversong Gallery, potter Richard Mund who designed some candlesticks and dishes for the inn, shops featuring antiques, crafts, books, and handmade quilts. There's the family home of our 13th Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, which is now a museum. And a big draw is the Neustadt Springs Brewery. If you're going there on a Saturday, you can tour it by appointment.

The easiest way to get to Neustadt is to take Highway 6 north to the Elora Road (Wellington County Road No. 7), and then follow it through Elora, Alma, right through Teviotdale, where it becomes County Road 109, on through Harriston, and about one kilometre past Clifford, turn right on to Grey Road 10 which takes you into Neustadt, about 90 minutes' drive from Guelph.

On the way home, about two kilometres south of Teviotdale on the Elora Road, stop for an organic ice cream cone or milkshake at the Mapleton Organic Dairy and take a look at their Calf Moo-tel, a row of little white hutches where the calves live while they're being weaned.

Trip to Ontario's South Coast

If you're aiming for an afternoon matinee at one of the many theatres in the area, first phone and reserve your ticket, then you can get your timetable arranged so that there's no last-minute rushing. It's best to have plenty of time to deal with any unforeseen events such as those highway construction detours that crop up all summer.

Take the trip to the Lighthouse Festival Theatre in Port Dover, for instance. There's more than one way to get there, but for the leisurely one, take Highway 24 south from Guelph, go through Cambridge and Brantford, and you could continue on No. 24 right down to Halfway House Corners, where No. 6 intersects, then turn left on No. 6 which takes you to Port Dover. It took me over two hours to get there, but I stopped for coffee on the way.

As you get closer to Lake Erie, you'll find that Norfolk County has an interesting mix of cash crop farming such as tobacco and ginseng. And the moderate climate provides the area with a Carolinian forest which includes many species of trees not found anywhere else in Ontario.

When you get to Port Dover, go down to the shore of Lake Erie, walk along the pier and take a look at the bronze memorial in memory of those commercial fishermen who lost their lives on Lake Erie. Port Dover is the home of the world's largest fresh water fishing fleet.

You'll find many shops, art galleries and restaurants there, but one that gets my vote is the Erie Beach Hotel, where you can get a wonderful meal of fresh perch. You could pop into the hotel first just to make your dinner reservation for after the show.

What else to do? Enjoy the beach, Lynn Valley Walking Trail, Port Dover Harbour Museum, fishing charters or rowing on Silver Lake.

Head for another lake

If you'd like a trip in another direction, point your car towards the Blyth Festival Theatre, where this summer they're previewing, among other plays, The Ballad of Stompin' Tom. It's about a two-hour drive, but there's plenty to see along the way.

Once you've chosen your performance and got your matinee ticket reserved at the theatre, you could head out of Guelph right after breakfast, drive east along Highway 7, through Kitchener and on to Stratford - perhaps stopping there to pick up a coffee and taking it down by the Avon River where you could sip the java and watch the swans.

Going on, Highway 8 from Stratford takes you right up to Goderich on Georgian Bay. You'll drive through many towns that all have a charm of their own.

Highway 8 intersects with Highway 4 at the town of Clinton, and here you turn right to continue about 15 kilometres down the road to Blyth.

For over 100 years Clinton has been the home of Bartliff's Bakery. That place is my personal downfall. It's a favourite spot for lunch and it's hard to leave without buying a pie or a box of baked goodies to take home.

If you have time, go over to the Railway School Museum in Clinton. This is in an old railway car that was used as a travelling schoolroom for the children in Northern Ontario in the early part of the last century. You can even check out the old school texts you used to agonize over. Browsing through one old reader in their collection, I found a poem that I agonized over when memorizing it in Grade 7. Amazingly, I could still recite it.

There are several heritage buildings in Clinton, including a Carnegie library and monuments to various heritage sites, including a former work farm for transients.

After the theatre, stay in the area for an early supper or go back to Highway 8 and follow it to Georgian Bay and have supper at Goderich, before heading home.

If you'd like a change of scenery on the return trip from Blyth you could keep going on Highway 4 east to Wingham, which intersects at Highway 86. Then take Highway 86 back to Guelph.

Personally, I would rather explore Ontario's towns and villages than anywhere else. Finding unexpected treats like a second-hand bookstore or a café with homemade buttermilk all add up to that perfect day.

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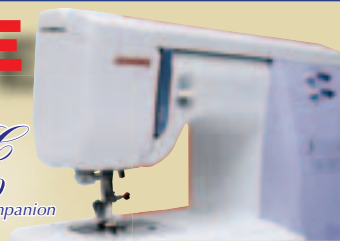


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