

'Stay a While in Culver' - first of a series

Inn by the Lake a charming haven close to the lake

By Anna Campbell, Correspondent

Editor's note: Within recent years, discussion has been prevalent in the Culver area of the importance not only of tourism and events in the Culver-Lake Maxinkuckee area (perhaps most visibly indicated by the launch of the Culver & Lake Maxinkuckee Visitor Center a few years ago), but also specifically the relevance of the community's overnight accommodations, primarily represented by several bed and breakfasts/inns, but also a resort facility. With that in mind, presented here is the first in a series of articles detailing what makes each of Culver's overnight bed and breakfasts and resorts unique.

The Inn by the Lake, at 830 Lakeshore Drive, is owned and operated by Gina and Mick Hnatusko, the couple having purchased it in March of 2000.

At the time of purchase the building had been vacant for nearly a decade.

"We wanted to run our own business," explains Gina. "At that time properties were flying off the market. After vacationing here in the summers and falling in love with the town we wanted to purchase a place

Gina, long-time hair stylist, enjoyed the service industry and wanted to put her people skills to use in a different capacity.

"I had actually never stayed at a Bed and Breakfast before owning one. But we thought, 'We can make this work.'"

The couple first added a second story onto the original office building. They use the second floor as their private residence. At the same time they completely remodeled two rooms adding insulation and double pain windows for comfort year 'round. Every year following they would remodeled the next room, then the next until all eleven rooms were completed.

"We learned as went along," says Gina. "We took our time and had fun decorating each room the way we wanted."

Each room has its own attached bathroom. All eleven bathrooms have their original 1950's tile from when it was first built.

"We receive a lot of positive comments about the original tile, for some guests, it brings back memories," Gina notes.

The Inn is a mix of a cozy bed and breakfast with hotel amenities. Each room has its own unique theme and has its own mini-refrigerator, coffee maker and microwave. The Inn is located in walking distance to Lake Maxinkuckee, restaurants, shopping and Culver Academies.

"The majority of our guests have a connection to the Academy," Gina says. "We have had guests as far as England and Scotland stay here, we really enjoy speaking with them and learning about where they live."

With 15 years of experience behind them, the Hnatuskos said that the best part of owning the Inn has been getting to know people from all over. Gina recounts one of her favorite stories: "We were sitting outside the Inn with a couple from England and the man remarked about how they do not have lightning bugs in England (as they watched lightening bugs appear at night fall). We would not have otherwise met so many interesting people. We love living in Culver."

Culver being a seasonal town, the Inn's busiest time of year is April through October. With the addition of a new winter event hosted by the Culver Chamber of Commerce, the Hnatuskos have seen an uptick in over-night stays.

"Culver Winter Fest has helped," Gina remarks. "It is a great idea!"

The Inn by the Lake's hours are Monday through Sunday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. The bed and breakfast may be found online at inn-bythelake.com or reached by phone at 574-842-4780.