

The Innkeeper's Innkeeper

A Jackson Jewel: Three Passions for Perfection

by Mary Margaret Storey

Several years ago I was among the fortunate journalists from all over the world to take part in the media preview tours to Europe prior to the opening of the world class exhibits at the Mississippi Commission for International Cultural Exchange in Jackson. I made multiple trips to Jackson both alone and with others. In fact I even organized some bus tours to see the exhibit and some of the other equally fine attractions that marvelous city has to offer. I must say I thought I had more or less seen it all until my recent stay at The Fairview Inn.

While the Fairview Inn is very much a family operation Peter Sharp is the one who is designated as the 24/7 bearer of the title Innkeeper. And an Innkeepers' Innkeeper he certainly is in all aspects of the trade to the most discerning clientele. He, his family and his staff have not missed a single detail in measuring up to the standards set by this Inn over the years. While I certainly hope that my experience over an undisclosed number of decades of travel and stays in the most highly rated small and large hotels counts for something, let's discount that and go with documentable proof.

My accommodations at The Fairview Inn entailed staying in The Spanish Suite and was the lodging for the Queen of Spain when she came with her husband to open The Majesty of Spain Exhibition in Jackson some years ago. The King's accommodations were next to hers and the suites are indeed fit for royalty in design and attention to detail but also in comfort and amenities.

More recently Prince Edward of Great Britain stayed at the Inn to present an honor on behalf of one of his father's royal charities. Sharp said the Prince was a very pleasant and unassuming guest. He traveled with two security guards as well as a personal aide who also stayed on the premises and made few special demands of the staff or management.

It would take more space than what is available to list all of the impressive touches which make this Inn so outstanding, so I will just give an inkling of what I consider signature excellence in this whole complex which includes the inn or hotel, the restaurant and the spa.

Instead of a small stocked refrigerator in the room, there is a full kitchen open 24/7 for the convenience of guests who want all types of drinks to fresh pastries to fresh fruit and all on the honor system. There is even filtered water for making tea which is a fine touch in keeping with Innkeeper Sharp's British heritage. That is also quite evident in the marvelous breakfast included in the room rates and described as a full breakfast which is an understatement...eggs, bacon, sausage, grits, cereals, oatmeal, fresh fruit, fresh juices, pastries, breads...too much to list.

Every thought has been given to the needs of those who may include exercise in their everyday plans. The hotel is located in a beautiful residential and university neighborhood which offers scenic walking nearby; however, guests of The Fairview Inn are also welcome to use the fully-equipped fitness center at a neighboring hospital just a short walk away.

When I learned that Innkeeper Sharp was the President of the Mississippi Association of Bed and Breakfast Owners which includes about one hundred fifty inns, I asked how the national economy was felt among the members of that group.

"We are really more of a smaller luxury hotel than we are a bed and breakfast, but I serve in this capacity because we all have common interests," Sharp said. "In fact, I recently took four days to make a trip of about two thousand miles visiting all of the members of the association to get a feel for what everyone was experiencing. Overall, as an industry things are down about forty percent in this state.



DeltaStyle/Mary Margaret Storey
The Sharps

"I have to add though that at The Fairview Inn we are actually up from last year and we are doing everything we can to be sure that continues throughout this year. We have had a drop in corporate and hospital business, but we have made up with that in other business such as family celebrations and private receptions. We are working very hard on this, but we also feel very fortunate that this is the situation," Sharp said.

Sharp has a long and distinguished career in the hotel industry which dates from his first job as a bus boy at the age of fourteen. However, he did pursue a pre-law degree in college before changing to International Hotel Management at Florida International University. He joined Hyatt immediately after college and stayed with the chain for a fourteen year stretch which found him in eleven different cities. He left that stay of over a decade to move to Bermuda where he opened three hotels. He was recruited by a former Hyatt employee whom he had known from those years to become the Vice President of Operations for the mega resort Atlantis in Nassau, The Bahamas. He spent five years there with responsibilities overseeing 5,000 rooms and 4,500 employees.

"We had moved so much and at that point we started to think about where we wanted our children to grow up and be educated. Together my wife and I chose the southeastern United States. Both of us say that we are in the business of romance and The Fairview Inn was the perfect fit for us. The inn was owned by one family since its inception, but the heirs were not interested in continuing to operate it. We loved it as both our own residence and the inn, restaurant and spa. We acquired it and began a half million dollar renovation," Sharp said.

Sharp said that you have to be truly passionate about the business if you want to succeed. He and his family occupy an 1800 square foot apartment on the premises and are available virtually around the clock to care for the needs of guests who occupy the eighteen guest suites. Sharp said the average innkeeper only lasts five years, because they do not realize what they are getting into in terms of business management and commitment. It is very difficult to survive on the average five rooms of most bed and breakfasts.

As for the parts of his life which Sharp likes most and least, there is no hesitation.

"I really love meeting the people who come here from all over the world and giving them the very best hospitality experience anywhere," Sharp began. "And I don't have to go anywhere myself to enjoy stories told about their experiences all over the world. It is like going on vacation myself. As for the difficult things about my job, I would say that I do not have enough hours in the day. I have to deal with all aspects of the operation from marketing to human resources to finance. But it is a real labor of love for all of us who have made The Fairview Inn what it is and we strive to keep it that way everyday."

Information on packages and reservations is available by calling toll free 1-888-948-1908.

Photographs by Mary Margaret Storey and courtesy of the Fairview Inn

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