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Ware Street Inn Offers Comfort, Conservation

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Lewiston's Ware Street Inn may be a very small business, but innkeepers Mike and Jan Barrett have still managed to reap big savings by doing business just a little bit differently.



Long before the Barretts started their business, they tried to live in an environmentally conscientious way. When, a decade ago, they bought the old Wellehan mansion on Ware Street to convert into a bed and breakfast, the couple's ecological awareness naturally spilled over into their business.

Early on, the Barretts decided meals would be served with cloth napkins, rather than paper ones. Not only do the napkins accentuate the air of elegance the innkeepers have worked to create, they are also reusable, which allows the inn to consume fewer natural resources. Though cloth napkins are more costly to purchase than paper napkins, their longer life also saves the Barretts money over time.

At the Ware Street Inn, saving paper doesn't end with napkins. The Barretts are also careful to

reuse the back sides of every piece of office paper that goes through their printers. Not content to cut the inn's paper usage in half, Jan also looks for more unconventional ways to save paper.

"I have one of those page-a-day calendars on my desk. Every day, when I tear off the previous day's page, I use the back of it to write out instructions for the housekeeping staff," she said.

Recycling has long been important to the Barretts, both before and after they opened the inn. Not only do they recycle paper, plastic, glass, cans, cardboard, and the other usual suspects, they also donate magazines, linens, and partially used shampoos, lotions, and soaps to charitable organizations like the Trinity Jubilee Center, a soup kitchen and drop-in for disadvantaged Lewiston residents. Whenever a portion of the inn undergoes a renovation, such as kitchen expansion project that is currently in the works, the Barretts donate their old fixtures and building supplies to Habitat for Humanity. Mike also composts grass clippings and other organic yard waste from the inn's expansive grounds.



Whenever feasible, the Barretts try to buy environmentally-friendly products. The inn uses energy-efficient compact fluorescent lighting and Mike purchased "green" paint to use in the newly expanded kitchen. The inn's housekeepers even make their own cleaning supplies from natural household products like vinegar and baking soda. Jan said the vendor that supplies the inn's personal hygiene amenities recently added a line of natural soaps. Once the inn's current stock is used up, she plans to switch to the new products.

"We do a lot, but I know there is probably more we could be doing. Every time we go to a convention, I make sure to attend the seminars on being green. If I have to miss one, I make sure to collect any handouts," said Jan.

But conservation at the Ware Street Inn isn't a duty that's relegated to the innkeepers and staff. The Barretts also enlist their guests in the effort. Signs in each room ask guests to reuse their towels and bed linens for the duration of their stay. While some guests do request new towels and linens, most are happy to comply.

“Our guests tend to be very educated, intelligent, environmentally conscious people. They notice that we make an effort to be responsible, and they appreciate it,” said Jan.

That single policy accounts for major cost savings at the inn. Jan estimates that the amount of laundry her staff does each day would more than double if every guest received new towels and linens each day. In addition to increased costs for energy, water, detergent and staff time, Jan said the biggest expense would be wear and tear on the sheets.

“We buy fairly high quality sheets. If we washed them every day, they would wear out much faster, and it would be quite expensive to replace them all the time,” she said.



While the money they save is an important motivator for the Barretts, Jan said her greatest satisfaction comes from knowing she is doing something to protect our natural resources.

“Everyone needs to pay attention to how they can save more. This isn’t just for us; it’s for the benefit of everyone. We can’t afford to keep being a disposable society,” she said.

“But if you’re a self-centered person – from the “me generation” – then at least think about how doing things differently can help to thicken your wallet. We’ve seen amazing savings by doing things that take very little effort.”

For more information about the Ware Street Inn, visit www.warestreetinn.com.