

The Journey To Family Friendly

...From One Room To Ten With A Waiting List!

By Helen Kerwin, Country Woods Inn – Glen Rose, TX



Waving goodbye to my twin daughters as they disappeared through the cattle guard on their way to college, I wondered if the celebrated empty nest syndrome would descend upon me. I had started and operated a retail flower shop in downtown Glen Rose for 12 years, which kept me extremely busy. However, coming home every night to a two-story house now empty of children, prompted me to ask a customer who ran another B&B in Glen Rose (who was picking up flowers for their room!), what it was like to run a bed and breakfast. My friend, Susan Bussey, still operating Bussey's Something Special after 10 years, responded enthusiastically, "Just do it! You will meet the nicest people!"

I began cautiously with one room: wallpapering, painting, laying new carpet, and sewing the necessary bed & breakfast accessories. Still unsure of my decision as I called our local Chamber of Commerce to inform them I was open for business, I was told immediately that a family of three needed a room for that night. Panicked, I ran to the nearest Wal-Mart and bought a youth bed, rearranged the furniture, and hoped they wouldn't mind walking to the bathroom at the end of the hallway! The next morning at breakfast they were joyous about their daughter playing in the dollhouse. I hadn't realized that my grandmother's old dollhouse would begin my journey.

That was six years ago! By the end of the first season, I converted the closet in that room into a bathroom and turned a second room, along with its closet into a bathroom, and then a third room. We always had horses on our wooded acreage, so I kept a basket of apples on the kitchen table for the kids to feed them. In the spring, the meadow off the main house blooms with wildflowers and we keep vases on the back porch for flower gathering. Soon I was getting repeat business and I realized that most

of my guests were from the Dallas/Ft. Worth area and did not have the opportunity to experience a country environment with farm animals.

My daughters and I built small corals, put feed barrels with small scoops by each pen and wired hand painted name plaques for each animal on their gates. Otis the goat was our first, joined by Sammy the pig and Scotty the lamb. Mark Martin, the dwarf donkey, is the latest addition to the farmyard.

The upstairs attic had been converted to a bedroom years before for my daughters. During my second season, I renovated it into a family loft, with a reading nook complete with books from Dr. Seuss to Nancy Drew and a deck built into the treetops. As I watched more and more children enjoy Country Woods Inn, I continued to be inspired by their enthusiasm! I accumulated a dozen bikes at garage sales, found a set of school lockers and filled them with baseballs, basketballs, footballs, and volleyballs. We built a horseshoe pit and just completed two campfire circles and I keep a basket of marshmallows, graham crackers, and Hershey bars, along with a book of campfire songs tucked inside in the main entryway.

Having river frontage was a natural amenity that I identified as a valuable marketing resource. I found two kayaks and a canoe in the local classified ads, and each spring I order ten inner tubes from our nearby gas station. Fishing poles and a well-stocked tackle box were purchased at a pawnshop and trail signs point the way to a fishing hole downstream from the main house. Being a shallow river, the Paluxy provides wonderful recreation for all ages! I keep minnow nets, towels, and river chairs on the back screen porch along with lemonade and homemade cookies.

What was once a chicken barn and toolshed took most of my third season converting into two rustic cabins. Each

has a game table inside, VCR with lots of movies, and porches with croquet sets bought at a local auction. One of the most unique amenities we have is a walking trail. An early morning walk through the woods is a magical experience for children of all ages, along with their parents. We are presently developing a wildlife management plan that I hope will establish a birdwatching market.

I quickly discovered family breakfasts are most efficiently accomplished with a buffet including: baskets of assorted breads, fruits, and pastries. Kids love digging through the large basket of assorted small boxes of cereals, and toasting French toast, topping it with mounds

groups that number between 10 and 30 have a difficult time locating accommodations other than hotels. I keep a wooden trunk filled with old fashioned games, such as jump ropes, jacks, marbles, and large pieces of chalk for drawing on the front porch walkway. Time and time again, after a family checks out I will get a phone call from them booking their family reunion or church group.

Children are what Country Woods Inn is all about! I have made it a priority to create a fun, rustic, and outdoorsy bed and breakfast for the whole family, surrounded by nature. Presently in my 6th year as an innkeeper, I have learned the two most important words to mar-



of whipped cream. I also keep a hot chocolate bar with cinnamon sticks.

Hearing about an abandoned house our fire department was planning a practice drill for, I quickly called the owner and offered to move and restore it. Purchasing it for one dollar I began an adventure that has since culminated into three 100-year-old houses being moved onto the property. By turning them into duplexes, I found I could promote my facility as a family reunion and church retreat property. Many families and

ketting my B&B are FAMILY FRIENDLY! Each Sunday while picking up croquet mallets and turning bikes over, I now wave goodbye to new children, watching them disappear through the cattle guard, knowing they will be back to splash in the river, feed Otis the goat, or climb on the haystack, just as my children used to do.

For more information on Country Woods Inn please visit their web site at www.countrywoodsinn.com.

