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WNC B&Bs turn to health, fitness services to stand out

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WAYNESVILLE — The looming Victorian house atop a small hill near downtown Waynesville looks like the typical Western North Carolina bed-and-breakfast. The Andon-Reid Inn has all the familiar touches: an original, wood-paneled foyer, a large porch with rocking chairs and antique furnishings.

But taking a walk downstairs, guests discover that the refinished basement is home to a commercial-grade StairMaster, treadmill and elliptical machine, a full set of weights, a sauna, an abdominal machine and other equipment usually found at the gym. The inn's owners, Ron and Rachel Reid, are certified personal trainers available to design a training regimen for their guests.

"We really wanted to set ourselves apart," said Rachel Reid. "Everyone has their own little niche. Our niche was the exercise and fitness area."

Finding their niche

With more than 50 bed-and-breakfasts, Asheville has the largest concentration of B&Bs in the state. There are dozens more bed-and-breakfasts scattered across WNC, so it is not surprising that owners are looking for ways to make their inns stand out from the crowd.

Some local B&Bs are taking advantage of the area's reputation as a health, fitness and healing mecca to offer their guests services that are traditionally only found in larger, less intimate settings or outside the house.

"I think overall, the big things bed-and-breakfasts are doing is personalizing the trip people are making," said Jim Palmer, president of the Asheville Bed-and-Breakfast Association and owner of The Lion and The Rose Bed and Breakfast. "Most people like the idea that each place you go is going to be different."

In the Asheville area, most B&Bs try to use local, organic produce and are able to cater to people's different dietary needs. Many also offer package deals with trips to the Biltmore Estate, organized outdoor adventures or spa services.

The 1889 WhiteGate Inn and Cottage in Asheville offers guests massages and other treatments like reflexology, facials and body treatments.

"Spas and yoga institutes are huge in Asheville," said Ralph Coffey, one of the inn's owners. "We've taken it to a different level."

Bed-and-breakfast owners agree that visitors to Asheville are often looking to take advantage of the health, spa and fitness activities in the area.

"To keep business alive, you need to look and know what the traveling public are looking for," Palmer said.

Combining lifestyle and business

The Reids decided to incorporate fitness into their B&B after traveling through North Carolina.

“We wanted to stay in a bed-and-breakfast, but we couldn’t work out anywhere,” the small, well-toned Rachel Reid said as she sat in the inn’s screened porch.

The couple stayed at B&Bs but had to visit hotels to use their workout facilities, which were usually old and inadequate.

When the Reids decided to move north from Florida to open a bed-and-breakfast, they knew what their niche would be.

“This was an opportunity to start a new adventure in our life, but still bring our lifestyle along with it,” Ron Reid said.

Rachel Reid designed a personal fitness routine for Allison McLean, 42, when she stayed at the Andon-Reid Inn. McLean said the Reids’ personal passion for health and fitness carries over into their business.

“It was very personal,” McLean said. “I felt like it wasn’t just an hour but that they really do take a personal interest.”

Focusing on nutrition

Rose Forbes’ passion for nutrition and health led her to open the Green Mountain Bed and Breakfast in Candler.

With a background as a nutrition consultant, Forbes decided to make juice fasts, healthy living retreats, and a focus on nutrition and a healthy lifestyle part of her business.

Set in a quiet residential neighborhood, the modern B&B offers guests organic, vegetarian meals, a small nutrition library and Forbes’ knowledge about living a healthy.

“If we are living that way in our own life, it doesn’t make sense not to do it at our bed and breakfast,” she said.

Debra Koerner came for a weeklong health retreat that included a three-day juice fast at the end of June. The week included educational seminars taught by Forbes, cooking lessons and trips to the grocery store along with yoga, walks and day trips in the region.

“I was really looking for a place to retreat away from the world for a little while,” said Koerner, who is leaving the corporate world to start her own business in Lexington, Ky.

Koerner said she enjoyed the personal attention she received, something she doesn’t think she would have gotten at some of the bigger institutes who specialize in juice fasts and health retreats.

“I didn’t feel like I got lost,” Koerner said. “Rose was there for me exactly when I needed it.”

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