

SHIFT

CASE STUDY

ROSEBUD COUNTRY INN – THE POWER OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS



MARCH 2019

THE ROSEBUD COUNTRY INN

BETTY JANE JANZEN, FONDLY KNOWN AS BJ, IS A PASSIONATE BED AND BREAKFAST OWNER

who believes that paying attention to the details, and sweating the small stuff, matters in delivering a great visitor experience. She prides herself on being a 'people connector' and recognizes that the emotional connections fostered between her guests and the people they meet while staying at the Rosebud Country Inn create powerful memories that draw them back time and again.

Since moving from the busy city of Calgary, an hour east to the hamlet of Rosebud, her life has changed. Along with her husband Ken, they purchased the 10-room Rosebud Country Inn and have been welcoming visitors to their beautiful property since March 31, 2009.

Visitors are drawn to this rural prairie community to see the professional theatre productions at the highly acclaimed Rosebud Theatre. The 35,000 annual patrons are the bedrock of tourism in the community and traditionally represent most of the Rosebud Country Inn's guests.



IN THE BEGINNING

Prior to purchasing the Inn, BJ worked in human resources, travelling extensively for work and she “got sick of lousy hotels and customer service”. Her travel experiences inspired her to want to run a bed and breakfast. However, before making a drastic career change, BJ and Ken invested six years running a two-room B&B in their Calgary home, where she continued to operate her home-based consulting business.

And then it happened. In December 2008, BJ and Ken learned that the Rosebud Country Inn was for sale and they purchased it.

Following in the previous owners’ footsteps, they continued to sell rooms to theatre patrons, most of whom stayed just one night. It didn’t take long to realize that the Rosebud Country Inn’s occupancy was intimately tied to the popularity of the play, and a less popular play meant fewer guests for the Inn.

Knowing they needed to do more to generate additional income and diversify their visitor base, BJ embraced the opportunity to be an experience partner for the SHiFT: Transforming Products to Experiences course in 2017. For nine months, she participated in an intense coaching process that led to a new partnered experience for the Travel Alberta program, and so much more. This training opportunity resulted in BJ exploring new ideas, partnerships and experience development opportunities to attract different audiences to the Inn who want to stay longer and explore the unique aspects of the destination beyond the theatre.

ENSURE EXCELLENCE IN YOUR CORE BUSINESS

Entering their 10th year of operation, BJ recognizes that it’s essential to be great at delivering on your core business first and grow from there.

The physical and emotional aspects of the Inn experience for guests is carefully managed across the entire visitor lifecycle before, during and after the visit.

This involves keeping up with what’s happening in her guests’ lives and going beyond their expectations by acknowledging birthdays, anniversaries and other major life events. Subtle, but meaningful techniques include:

- Placing personalized notes in rooms;
- Ensuring dietary needs are accommodated;
- Knowing a guest’s favourite room;
- Investing in ongoing property maintenance and ensuring aesthetics align with visitor expectations;
- Delivering fresh coffee to each room a half hour prior to breakfast;
- Providing a small gift bag of locally made bath products in each room;
- Featuring local foods, artisan crafts and art works to differentiate their retail offering, and
- Hand-writing 584 Christmas cards!



Focusing on the details, delivering personalized customer service and having a passionate drive for creating value for visitors have solidified Rosebud Country Inn's reputation as a great place to stay and established a foundation of loyal, repeat clientele who feel like they are part of a family. BJ is proud of the long-standing relationships cultivated with guests who come to visit year after year – even if they are not staying at the Inn. “A lot of my guests are baby boomers and seniors. In this era of technology, they value the sense of belonging we create and the personal connection they have with us.”



●●●●● REVIEWED 23 SEPTEMBER 2018

FIRST TIME VISIT BUT CERTAINLY NOT THE LAST

We could not have improved on anything. The Rosebud Country Inn has it all. From home baked pie upon arrival, a welcoming check in, wonderful room with a view, good night sleep and a tasty and wholesome breakfast. The attention to detail is second to none and the personable and accommodating staff topped it all off. We can't wait until our next visit and have certainly spread the word to family and friends. JAMES J, ST. ALBERT AB | STAYED: JUNE 2018

AN UNUSUAL DIFFERENTIATOR

When BJ and Ken first purchased the Inn, they weren't sure how long it would take to clean and prepare the rooms for the next guests. Rather than have people sit and wait, guests who arrived before their room was ready were welcomed into the parlour for a piece of fresh, homemade pie.

The popularity of the pie spread to the local community and BJ now has an established partnership with Darlene Scott, “The Pastry Charmer”, who comes from Calgary to make pies every Monday and Tuesday.

The reputation of the delicious, home baked Rosebud Country Inn pies has grown to the point where visitors will come out specifically to enjoy a piece at the Inn – some even purchase an entire pie to take home. Indeed, they are the only accommodator in Alberta leveraging this unique differentiator, and they currently sell up to 40 pies a week!



Elsie Anctil reviewed Rosebud Country Inn – 5★

December 5, 2016

I just want to say thank you to BJ and her staff for their charming accommodations and gracious hospitality this past weekend for our staff Christmas Party. The response from everyone was, that it was a “class act”. From the minute we arrived to the minute we left, everyone truly enjoyed themselves and felt welcomed. They were all thoroughly impressed with their rooms (one staff member commented that it reminded her of home back east...she actually didn't want to leave). The Inn was decorated very festive for the occasion, and we enjoyed ourselves in the vaulted-ceiling gathering space for spirits and laughter prior to and after the show “Miracle on 34th Street”. When it was time to retire to our rooms, the beds had been turned down, with an extra-special delectable pastry (made by Mousse Cake Sally) awaiting our arrival. Prior to heading out the next morning, we were served a delicious breakfast. Not certain how we will top this for our Christmas Party next year. This is definitely a must for anyone's bucket list!!!

RAISING THE BAR WITH NEW EXPERIENCES

While theatre patrons remain the backbone of the Inn's business, BJ's participation in Travel Alberta's SHiFT program stimulated new ideas for partnered experiences that could diversify and add new revenue streams, mitigating some of the impacts felt from the less popular theatre productions. Recognizing that her guests have a sense of curiosity and love for learning, BJ began connecting guests to local experts who could bring distinct destination stories to life in new ways.

For her foray into the world of being an experience provider, BJ partnered with Shelley Rymal, an aromatherapist and owner of Nature's Essential Garden. Shelley immersed the group of 34 SHiFT participants into the history of the local plants she uses to make her all-natural aromatherapy oils and their health-related benefits. Everyone was then invited to make their own personalized bath salts, infused with whatever combination of aromatherapy oils suited their individual preferences.

From this first partnered experience, a mutually beneficial business partnership emerged, and the pair now have a new program that is retailed through the Inn and offered several times a year.

For Shelley, it reignited her passion for teaching and helped her dream further about evolutions for her own business. For BJ, it opened her eyes to new possibilities beyond being a traditional inn, for tapping into her community network and developing experiences that could differentiate her business.



“ The SHiFT program broadened my horizons to realize that our property can be used for more than just people coming for the theatre and one-night stays. ”

– BJ Janzen

A NEW WAVE OF EXPERIENCES EMERGED

In February 2015 the Rosebud Country Inn offered its first Valentine's weekend package that incorporated a variety of partnered experiences including a five-course meal with sommelier-led wine tasting, a chocolate-making experience and Shelley's aromatherapy experience. BJ admits this type of offering was outside her comfort zone. When one of the well-travelled participants who hailed from the Okanagan said, "I've been to hundreds of wine tastings and this is the best I've ever experienced,"

BJ realized that the rewards of stepping outside the box were worth the risks.

In 2017, BJ continued efforts to diversify the Inn's visitor markets. In partnership with Bill Bloss, a guest and friend who had been coming to the Rosebud Country Inn before BJ and Ken purchased it, they launched a new Dinosaur Bone Discovery experience. Bill is a passionate, amateur paleontologist who, in 2015, made a significant discovery of a complete Gorgosaurus skeleton that's now at the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller.

The program is offered at a cost of \$795 per couple, with a maximum group size of 20 people, or 10 rooms.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

Visitors who take part in the Dinosaur Bone Discovery weekend:

- Are greeted by BJ who introduces Bill and his wife at the Rosebud Country Inn.
- Bill introduces everyone to the history of Drumheller and Alberta badlands area.
- Each participant gets to feel, hold and lick a dinosaur vertebra as Bill tells stories of his big discovery and describes the types of fossils they might find when they set out exploring the following day.
- Guests then enjoy a relaxing evening at the Inn.
- The morning begins with a delicious, hot breakfast at the Inn.
- A bus arrives to transport everyone 40 minutes to the dinosaur bone site.*
- It is here that guests become fossil hunters as they immerse in the landscape and hunt for dinosaur bone fragments on the surface under Bill's expert supervision.
- There are literally hundreds of bone fragments at the site. Bill guides and works with each guest to help them find and identify a unique item that they can take home.
- Upon returning to the Inn in the late afternoon, participants work together with Bill to identify their fossils and enjoy a delicious five-course meal together, so they can share stories of their day.
- On occasions where a guest finds something that Bill hasn't seen before, he will research the item to identify it for the guest the next morning.

This experience taps directly into the travel motivations of BJ's visitors by affording access to local experts who share their knowledge and stories while engaging visitors in learning activities in a social atmosphere.

* The fossil hunting is done on public land where only surface collecting, no digging, is allowed at the site. All finds are reviewed by Bill and any significant finds are taken to the Royal Tyrrell Museum, so the museum has a record of the GPS coordinates where the piece was found.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CREATE SPACE FOR RELATIONSHIPS TO FLOURISH – IT CREATES MEMORIES FOR VISITORS THAT THEY TAKE HOME AND CHERISH.

“When people are going out the door from the Dinosaur Bone Discovery experience, they have a hug line, believe it or not. They stand at the door and they hug every person who has been at the Dinosaur Bone Discovery because they love each other by the end of the weekend. It's pretty great.”

– BJ Janzen

TANGIBLE RESULTS

Approximately one year after launching an experiential programming revenue stream for their business, BJ realized that her time would be better spent working on new revenue generating programs and having staff take a greater role in managing some of the Inn's operational requirements. As hoped, the new experiences have:

- Diversified their visitor offering by introducing four new SHiFT-inspired experiences with themes aligned to: Dino Bone Discovery, Book Club, Women's Shopping Weekend and Valentines. She also added a new spa weekend;
- Generated new revenue from five programs and packages, offered 16 times;
- Attracted new customers;
- Contributed to increasing new visitation during the Inn's lower occupancy season that occurs when the Rosebud Theatre plays are not offered;
- Increased the average length of stay. Previously, most weekend stays were one night, now 15% of weekend stays are longer than one night and the goal is to grow this to 25% by the end of 2019.
- Decreased the dependency on the Rosebud Theatre to attract guests (although this is still a vital part of their business);
- Contributed to their 4.5-star rating on TripAdvisor.

Rosebud Country Inn is now becoming a destination in and of itself. In 2018, the Inn saw more non-theatre visitors than ever before, and this is just the beginning!

FAILURE IS PART OF SUCCESS

SUCCESS IS NOT GUARANTEED WITH EVERY IDEA. "SOMETIMES THE IDEA IS NOT THE RIGHT ONE, SOMETIMES THE TIMING IS OFF," SAYS BJ.

The Women's Fall Weekends, introduced in 2013, were successful for the first three years and four programs were offered in total. But difficulties in finding a reliable experience partner to provide massage services and Alberta's economic challenges resulted in declining interest in the program and BJ set it aside in 2016. She tried introducing a Book Club weekend, to be led by a partner who works for the local Indigo book store, and she was surprised to see there was no uptake on this idea.

But these setbacks haven't discouraged her. Instead, she digs in to understand what elements of the experience may not have been appealing to her target audience and reflects on how to approach the experience from a new angle to create the value the audience is seeking. With a new experience partner now secured, the Women's Fall Weekend will be offered again in 2019. And she is exploring a different approach to the Book Club weekend that she hopes will garner interest when relaunched.



GOOD PARTNERS ARE NOT ALWAYS EASY TO FIND

BJ collaborates with many great partners. But she has also had disappointments along the way. She knows her guests have high expectations about the service and experience they will get at the Inn and wants things done right. As a result, she has high expectations of the partners to align to her standards of excellence.

BJ and the partners with whom she works closely identified several critical elements to successful partnerships including:

- Reliability and trustworthiness;
- A common work ethic and understanding of the quality of visitor experience to be delivered;
- Sharing a similar value system;
- A sincere interest in contributing to each other's success; and
- Mutual respect for the unique value each person is bringing to the partnership.

And while the financial aspect of partnerships is important, BJ does not start with the money; she starts with a sincere desire to share stories and their passion for what they do with visitors.



“BJ is all relationship and all heart. She's not shy about creating value. She understands her link in the value chain, what she can provide that's unique and where she can partner with others to create value for her guests and generate benefits for everyone involved. She brings the experience to the next level.” – Frank Nickel, former Executive Director, Rosebud Centre of the Arts

RELATIONSHIPS THAT GENERATE MUTUAL BENEFIT DRIVE VISITOR VALUE

When asked, her partners say BJ doesn't just create value for her guests; she cares about her community, partners, residents and other local businesses. Her success, in part, is an outcome of the strong relationships she nurtures with the people in her network and her ability to ensure that mutual benefit is derived for everyone involved. She defines her role as a 'connector of people' and prides herself on staying up to date on the other local businesses, artisans and service providers. She makes the effort to know what's out there and looks to make connections between the local businesses and her guests to respond to their individual interests and needs.

“She's a pretty big deal in the community and she wants to share the benefits of her guests,” says experience partner, Shelley Rymal.

The Inn is also an employer in this small community, supporting students from the Rosebud Theatre program each year. She is fiercely dedicated to supporting her staff and ensuring they too feel part of the Rosebud family. Lauren, a former staff member of three years said, “what I gained from working at Rosebud Country Inn was a family. My goal was to pass on that atmosphere/feeling to the guests. Many guests have said that when they walk in the door, they feel like they are coming home.”

“BJ takes full advantage of the assets she has in her community and ensures that her clients benefit and that the community members benefit from what she does.” – Bill Bloss

WHAT DOES EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL MEAN TO YOUR BUSINESS?

In this technological age, my guests want to have a sense of belonging. Experiential travel is partly about creating a welcoming feeling where my visitors get a sense that they are part of the Rosebud family. Our guests talk about how much they appreciate the relationship they have with us and how much they value the relationships and people we connect them to as part of delivering a consistently good visitor experience.

KEY SHIFTS

There are four primary evolutions that occurred as a result of being involved as an experience provider with the Travel Alberta SHiFT program.

1. **FROM:** Seeing Rosebud Country Inn as a B&B that sells staying in a beautiful room...
TO: Viewing themselves as a 'connector of people' and recognizing that their guests' best memories come from the people they meet and relationships they create.
2. **FROM:** A reliance and focus on theatre patrons and one-night stays...
TO: Attracting new markets by creating and offering experiences that encourage visitors to stay longer and return in the future.
3. **FROM:** Nourishing relationships between the Inn and its guests...
TO: Fostering a network of relationships that create value for everyone involved and enhance the experience for visitors.
4. **FROM:** Thinking that BJ had to do everything herself...
TO: Building trust with partners who add new value to the visitor experience while alleviating some of the workload for BJ and her staff.



ADVICE FOR OTHERS INTERESTED IN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL

1. Focus on doing your core business well and build from there.
2. Don't compromise on what you consider to be of value – partner with people who have that same value system.
3. Develop relationships with good partners and build trust – it gives you the ability to let go and realize you don't have to do it all on your own.
4. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, shift gears and try new approaches if new ideas don't work the first time.
5. Developing new experiences is a lot of work, but they sell out and the customers love them!

THE FUTURE

Going forward, the goal is to continue to be open to change, embrace new ideas and look for creative ways to appeal to visitors for extended stays. Currently, BJ is exploring several new partnerships including the Art Society in Strathmore for painting experiences, a women's shopping weekend and revamping the original book club weekend idea. She is also working to attract small corporate groups of up to 10 people from Calgary, Red Deer, Drumheller and Edmonton for meetings.

Having a suite of unique experiences that can be customized or adapted to new audiences is proving to be beneficial. The work BJ and her team have invested to date has helped them refine their skills in developing and delivering experiences, contributed to establishing new partners, and is helping them respond to group requests when they ask for something different as an add-on to their meeting experience. Plus, it's fun! BJ's energy is palatable, and her infectious personality is part of her 'secret sauce' for success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study was made possible through the cooperation of the following persons. Our sincere thanks to each of them for their contributions, insights and expertise.

BJ Janzen, owner, Rosebud Country Inn
Marty Eberth, Director of Experience Development, Travel Alberta
Shelley Rymal, Nature's Essential Garden and Sage Valley Marketing
Frank Nickel, former Executive Director, Rosebud Centre of the Arts
Lauren de Graaf, staff member, Rosebud Country Inn
Bill Bloss, retired, amateur paleontology expert

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MARCH 2019

