

Gingerbread Manor offers 19th century pace, philosophy

Diana Louise Carter • Staff writer • July 15, 2010

Darla Bair was really bothered by something she noticed in our society: For many people, life moves at too hectic a pace.

The owner of Gingerbread Manor Bed and Breakfast, south of Brockport, Bair decided to do something about that. She has run the inn at 6590 Lake Road for the last 12 years.

This summer, she added the School of Living Arts, which amounts to using her B&B as a place to reclaim a little sanity, one class or experience at a time.

"I want this space to feel like a sanctuary," Bair said recently in her spacious 19th-century farm homestead.



Gingerbread Manor Bed and Breakfast has added a School of Living Arts, offering classes in gardening, knitting, dressing your dolly, and cooking in the 175-year-old barn behind the main house.
(MARIE De JESUS staff photographer)

"I feel like many folks in our community ... right now are searching for wholeness in their souls." Hence, the growing interest in yoga, meditation and retreats, she said.

Bair feels there isn't just a need to learn new skills to cope with stress, but also to "re-skill," or learn skills that have been absent for a generation or two.

"I grew up learning skills, to use a sewing machine and knitting and baking bread and how to hang your wash on the line," Bair said, noting those skills were imparted by a grandmother who lived in Lancaster, Pa., Amish country.

A recently retired school music teacher and still the director of the Amadeus Chorale, Bair is offering classes in music. But she also is listing classes in gardening, knitting, dressing your dolly, and cooking. Jam-making is a possibility and she has a series of house concerts that will begin in the fall.

Two lambs are going to live in the stone-walled barn on the property starting later this month and that could lead to spinning and weaving.

"I come from a family of all girls," Bair said, explaining the closet of prom dresses and finery she keeps in a ground-floor closet for the dress-up birthday parties she hosts. Her two girls are grown and on their own.

When Bair isn't holding parties, she offers the parlor for book clubs to meet.

"I just love to have people here, enjoying the space." And it is a lovely space, with a full dining room and parlor set aside for guests to enjoy. There's also a library, which doubles as a music room.

Bair lives in an apartment on the ground floor of the house, leaving three bedrooms on the second floor for overnight guests.

The School of Living Arts is an expression of Bair's philosophy about taking time to slow down, she insists, not a money-making venture.

"I'm an entrepreneur, but it's way more on the spiritual side," she said of her classes.

Indeed, the small fees she charges may be too low, she concedes. Some classes cost as little as \$12.

Pattie English, co-owner of The Chalet of Canandaigua, just north of the Ontario County hamlet of Cheshire, said daytime or evening events at her B&B aren't really about creating a new cash stream.

"It actually gives us more exposure than it does revenue," English said. She and her business partner haven't specifically marketed their upscale B&B for non-lodging events, but they frequently get requests to host them and they comply when they can.

People who attend those events often return to book a room at another time.

"I'm getting into nutrition and we'll be looking into holding some cooking classes that won't necessarily be overnight," English said.

And sometimes requests combine daytime events at the place and overnight lodging, such as scrapbook workshops and quilting retreats.

Bair has had similar requests.

If she succeeds in sharing her own philosophy, this summer will be her time to see what floats. Perhaps lazily, like an inner tube on the river of life.

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