

Hotels, motels change with the times

By LYNN ORR

Forty years ago when a weary traveler found himself 30 miles from Detroit, he lit his trusty lamp and searched for a warm barn in which to spend the night.

Well, not quite. But the hotel and motel business in the outlying suburban area was scanty at best.

The Mayflower Hotel in Plymouth and the Botsford Inn in what was then Farmington Township were the outstanding exceptions.

Our wayward traveler certainly wasn't greeted by neon signs proclaiming vacancies, or "Have your next affair with us," as the Holiday Inn in Farmington Hills recently invited passersby.

Population growth and shift from the urban center made the suburbs in the last 20 years; and growing businesses proved in need of attendant services, such as overnight inns for visiting salespersons.

Some suburbs, such as Southfield, may have benefited from the urban decline, often grabbing convention business away from the older establishments in downtown Detroit.

For most inns in the suburbs, however, weekday business is related to businesses around them. It's the weekend trade that's hard to get.

TO COMBAT the weekend slump, hotels and motels have jumped on the restaurant and cocktail lounge bandwagon in recent years.

Holiday Inns, for example, used to cater to the family traveling public, says Farmington Hills Innkeeper Pat Fallon.

"Now, we're getting out of that. We're much more concerned about the restaurant and bar business," she explains. Both the Hills Holiday Inn and a Holiday Inn in Livonia have revamped its food and spirits' trade.

A major restoration of the Livonia motel's restaurant resulted in "The Company Store," an expanded restaurant with a mining town theme using artifacts culled from the Copper Country of the Upper Peninsula.

"We're a commercially oriented inn," says Innkeeper Jerry O'Meara, "but the weekend winter business is slow." He's hoping the weekend restaurant trade improves the business.

The Holiday Inn in Farmington Hills is taking the concept one step further with the addition of a "Holiday," an indoor recreation area with pool, sauna, whirlpool and other facilities geared for mini-vacations and weekend trade, Ms. Fallon says.

Opened in 1976, the inn has 146 rooms with 85 per cent occupancy and plans an addition of 150 more rooms. The opening of 1-125 has expanded the business, including airport trade.

But then location was a prime factor when the facility opened, she says.

"It just took them a couple more years than expected to get the freeway through."

OLDER established innkeeping businesses in the suburbs have a different approach to business.

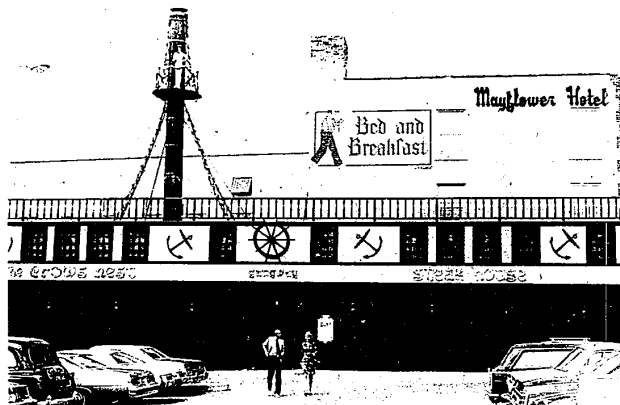
The Mayflower Hotel in Plymouth advertises its vintage atmosphere and continued family-owned expertise, says manager Kirk Lorenz, son of owner Ralph Lorenz.

"It's hard to keep alive in this business—you have to work at it," he says. And he does just that. Customers who fill 56 rooms at the hotel 91 per cent of the time are welcomed at tea time when scones and delicacies are offered. Pools, tennis and golf are not part of the package.

"There's lots of rest and relaxation here, and you don't have to listen to someone diving and splashing in the



The Botsford Inn has been a landmark of the antiquity," says owner John Anbut. (Staff photo) Farmington area since 1836. "We accentuate the



The Mayflower Hotel in downtown Plymouth recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Remodeling in recent years has included new food and cocktail facilities that help make it one of the most popular dining spots in western Wayne County. (Staff photo)

pool." He relies on Plymouth's parks and recreation department to provide facilities for those patrons who want such activities.

He's proud that the hotel has never closed in 50 years and is planning expansions such as solar heating for the hot water system, two more restaurants and 40 more rooms within the next few years.

He also relies on the banquet business, hosting more than 200 weddings a year with a full-line of banquet facilities.

The Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills also relies on banquet facilities to round out the overnight trade.

Advertised as an inn since 1836, competition with the modern hotels isn't a problem, says owner John Anbut.

"Our biggest problem is describing everything," because, we're different," he says. "We accentuate the antiquity."

He uses brochures and membership in the Backroads organization to invite out-of-state travelers to the Inn on

Grand River. Weddings, seminars, banquets, and other catering services totaling about 500 yearly round out the business for the 50-room hotel.

Like Lorenz, he believes ownership on the property is a key to good service, which his customers prize.

SERVICE often depends on hotel and motel employees, which also have grown along with the facilities. More than 17,000 hotel and motel workers in the tri-county area are members of the Hotel and Motel restaurant employees, cooks and bartenders union, Local 24.

The union added 2,000 employees alone when the Detroit Plaza in the Renaissance Center was opened. Membership has grown from about 14,000 10 years ago, some of it in the suburbs.

All kitchen classifications, waiters, waitresses, maids, desk clerks, cooks and bartenders are included in the union which was created with the merging of four unions in 1974.

Tipped classifications are the low-

est-paid, according to Candy Johnston of the union's organization department. Minimum wage laws allow a deviation for employees who receive tips, but no one makes under \$2 an hour, Ms. Johnston says.

Highest paid hotel workers are chefs, such as executive grade chefs who make a minimum of \$44 per day.

The majority of the union's membership in the tri-county area is urban, although the Hines Park Motel in Livonia and the Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills have contracts with the union.

Five of the Holiday Inns in the area contract with the union as well.

ALTHOUGH the neon-lit motels and traditional inns stand out, the suburbs are dotted with small motels which usually cater to the out-of-town construction trade, like the 26-room Rainbow Park Motel in Farmington.

Weekly rates for hard-hats, musicians, and other traveling workers often are the backbone of the small motel's business, said one manager



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