

Crossroads

Iris Jones

Area couple now Fla. innkeepers

When Susan Wals graduated from West Bloomfield High School, her resume didn't say "Innkeeper."

She was destined for a career in retail management.

When Susan married Jerry Jerzykowski of Shelby Township, he wasn't thinking bed-and-breakfast either. Jerry was in industrial graphics and advertising.

Susan still does a little retail management, and Jerry works part time at a golf course, but the heart of their personal and working life is a 1912 house nestled in the historic district of a warm southern city.

Their business cards now read: Coquina Inn, Bed & Breakfast, 544 S. Palmetto, Daytona Beach, Fla., 32114.

"We stayed in bed-and-breakfast places whenever we traveled," Jerry said. "Cooking and entertaining were our hobbies, and our jobs were both people-related, so we decided to go into the hospitality business."

Jerry has been going to Florida for most of his life, so it was easy to decide where they wanted to live. His parents moved to Ormond Beach a few years ago, so Susan and Jerry went to visit them, scuffling through the dunes that are the signature of all the barrier islands on the Atlantic coast of Florida, and the next thing they knew they were innkeepers.

Susan's parents, Helen and Ralph Wals of West Bloomfield, don't stay anywhere else when they go to Florida, of course. The Coquina

House has four bedrooms, each with its own bath, and it was the only bed-and-breakfast in Daytona Beach when they began to renovate the 3,600-square-foot mansion.

"Susan and Jerry opened the Coquina Inn for Thanksgiving 1990, and by spring of 1991 they were listed in 'A Guide to Small and Historic Lodgings in Florida,' Helen Wals said.

The listing says that the Coquina Inn is "one of the finest bed-and-breakfasts in the state... on a street of splendid town houses in a historic district that is at the heart of the city's redevelopment plans... a house of lyrical qualities, its curved arches set behind high mossy oaks."

"Jerry and Susan Jerzykowski have taken this one-time parsonage, richly textured in Coquina rock, dormered, with an upstairs picket porch, and restored it to period elegance with an imaginative eye for color and a passion for acquiring the best of everything."

"We're in our second year as innkeepers now," Jerry said. "Our business is growing even in a bad economic year, but it takes three or four years to really establish a business like this. We'll know it's succeeded when Susan and I can both stop working our other part-time jobs."

Rooms at the Coquina Inn cost \$69 to \$99, a little more during the Daytona 500 or during Bike Week. For information, contact the inn at the address above or telephone (904) 254-4969.



Photos by IRIS SANDERSON JONES

Daily decisions involve whether to enjoy the beach (at left), or ride a bike down the old railway trail (above) on Gasparilla Island, Fla.

Gasparilla in the Gulf

Life's a beach at Florida's Boca Grande

By Iris Sanderson Jones
special writer

BOCA GRANDE, FLA. — The decision of the moment here on Gasparilla Island is where to turn my deck chair, left toward the two small palm trees, right toward the feathery Australian pines or straight ahead to face the Gulf.

The pelicans on the poles just offshore are obviously trying to make the same decision.

Without raising my head I see my "front yard," a 100-foot swath of wild sea oaks, with narrow wooden walkways running through them to the beach. The shell seekers are doing the Gasparilla Stoop, head down, eyes focused on the sand. The Wisconsin man is shore fishing again, although he never catches much and doesn't seem to care.

That's the way it is here in the town of Boca Grande, on Gasparilla Island, one of the barrier islands on the Gulf coast of Florida between Fort Myers and Sarasota.

THERE ARE things to do. You can enjoy the tarpon fishing that brought wealthy northerners down here early in the century. You can bike the path along the old railway right of way that runs the seven-mile length of the island. Katharine Hepburn does it in her stocking feet.

You can even sail down the chain of islands past Useppa and Captiva to Sanibel, which has the best shelling beach in Florida. Gasparilla has the second-best shelling beach, but then Sanibel has many things that you won't find here. A skyline of

sorts. Bumper to bumper traffic. Shopping centers. A long bridge that connects to the mainland.

The Gasparilla skyline includes Australian pines and two-story beach houses. The shopping is within a block either way of Park and Fourth. You can cross the \$120 toll bridge in 10 seconds, even slowing to watch the seabirds.

Seabirds fly over the shell mounds the Calusa Indians left behind. Seagulls followed Spanish fishermen here in the 1600s, and they still follow boats out of marinas on the Bayou side of the island, where Isabel Whidden sells fresh and salt water fishing licenses, arranges guides and tells stories about her father, Captain Sam, who wore a rolled-up paper bag on his head as a hat when he took the duPonts fishing.

There is nothing left of the train that the Bradleys of Boston built to carry phosphate to the ships and northern socialites to the Gasparilla Inn. They don't ask for bank and social references at the inn anymore, but it's still the heart of the Christmas-through-April social season.

YOU MAY not be asked to the big Beachfront summer homes along the Gulf, but you are always invited by librarian Pansy Cost to explore a tiny jewel called the Johann Fust Community Library built by Roger and Louise Amory of Boston and filled with their treasures at 10th and Gasparilla streets.

Push through the carved cypress doors of the library and look around before you go down a few steps to the garden. You will see a page from

a 15th century Gutenberg Bible, a sheet from the 5th century Book of the Dead, 16th century Japanese doors. Check out the shell collection left by Henry Francis duPont.

Cost remembers when the highlight of a Gasparilla day was to meet the train, see who was coming in and going out. The tracks were replaced by a path that runs the length of the island through palms and casuarinas.

The waiting room of the old railway depot still exists, but the only trains you'll see today are model trains on the shelf of the Loose Caboose. That is "downtown" Boca Grande: sidewalk tables at the Loose Caboose, a few restaurants and shops, and Boca Grande Realty, which rents available villas and townhouses from \$600 to \$1,000 a

week, up to \$200 on a per-night basis.

From my townhouse balcony, I watch the world go by. The Wisconsin fisherman is sunbaked on one side from standing still so long. Shell lovers are still going by, doing the Gasparilla Stoop.

Eventually I will tour the lighthouse, go to the state park, shell the beach, but right now I'm trying to decide whether to go to the Pink Elephant or the Lighthouse for dinner. Decisions, decisions.

For more information, contact Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau, P.O. Box 2445, Fort Myers, Fla. 33902 or call toll-free (800) 237-6444. Or call Mark Spurgeon at Boca Grande Realty toll-free (800) 325-6287.

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Jerry and Susan Jerzykowski are innkeepers at the Coquina Inn in Daytona Beach, Fla.



Susan Jerzykowski prepares for the holidays at the Coquina Inn in Daytona Beach.