

Conference centre newly opened

Huntsville resort has a Grandview

By JEFF ROSEN

Grandview Inn's name attests to the majestic beauty surrounding this year-round resort on Fairy Lake near Huntsville. There's more than tranquility and scenic splendor at this "adult getaway for stressed out city dwellers" though, there's business ... plenty of business.

Dale Peacock, assistant general manager and director of marketing for Grandview, says that while Grandview has gone after an upscale market — affluent individuals between 35 and 55 — it decided to add a 2,100-square-foot conference centre to the property last year because of the seasonal nature of the 150-acre resort.

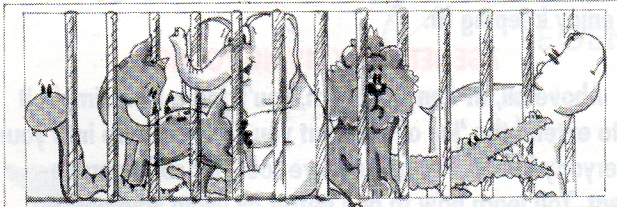
Without it, Grandview would only be able to continue at a brisk pace a few months of the year, as months like April



► A patio with tables and chairs surrounds Grandview Inn's pool.

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and November are difficult to sell.

Beside the economic realities, Peacock has found that people are interested in getting away from the "pressure-cooker" environment of the city during business meetings and conferences.

Although the resort had been the chosen locale for some conventions prior to opening the conference centre last May, Peacock says business had been "absolutely incredible."

"We had Sony scheduled to arrive May 27 and the conference centre scheduled to open the same day. At 10 a.m. that day, we were putting on the final touches. They came in, had a wonderful time and gave us a top rating."

Since then, Grandview's staff has been striving to ensure that all conference guests enjoy fine dining, superb rooms and good amenities to provide an atmosphere conducive to "creative thinking."

This is no easy task, Peacock points out, as arranging a conference is a complex procedure and requires a lot of planning by a variety of individuals.

This process begins with Grandview's sales people who find the leads, phone businesses and organizations, visit clients in the cities and invite them to inspect the site, where most deals are clinched.

Once the deal is signed and all basic questions have been answered, the sales involvement ends and the file is handed over to the conference co-ordinator who plans every detail with the company's conference co-ordinator in 15-minute intervals.

"For a big group, this is quite an onerous task. It might involve hundreds of phone calls and thousands of feet of fax paper to develop the agenda."

Once the agenda is developed and a budget formulated, the plans then move to the operations people — those working at the front desk, the dining-room managers and porters.

Two weeks prior to a group's arrival, a forecast meeting is held to "walk through" the agenda with all department heads.

Finally, the big day arrives. The company's employees begin arriving.

"Most often, as soon as a group arrives, changes start happening. Every single group we have seems to have been impressed and pleased with the service."

While groups come to Grandview for different reasons, Peacock says they

want their basic needs satisfied and are looking for flexibility coupled with personal service.

While set up to handle conferences of up to 200 people, Grandview still tries to maintain the country inn feeling which 17-year-old Minnie Cookson envisaged back in 1884.

Cookson, who had her dream realized in 1910, retained control of Grandview until her death in 1937, and her family continued operating it until December 1970, when it was purchased by Bruce and Judy Craik of Dundas, Ont.

After renovating and expanding its facilities, Grandview reopened in July 1972 as a 15-room country inn. The Craiks operated Grandview until 1986, when Bruce Evans became the resort's new owner.

Under Evans, Grandview has grown by leaps and bounds and now can accommodate about 200 people.

"We want to become firmly fixed in people's minds as a luxury resort that can provide a certain level of comfort and amenity, but with a country inn feeling," Peacock said. ▶

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