



Wayne (left) & Brent



Photos from Foxwood interior and the garden



## Hosts for a decade

By Sean McLennan

Jane Jacobs, the author of that classic of urban design, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* holds that the key to vital communities and healthy cities is diversity. Diversity of use, diversity of age, diversity of architecture...generally not how North American cities are laid out—we tend to have broad residential areas, industrial areas and commercial areas where we live, work, and play (read: shop) respectively. Fortunately, as the densification of Calgary's inner city continues, diverse and vital communities have been organically blossoming over the last decade or two.

The Beltline around 17th Avenue is a good example—it's a place of great economic, social and structural diversity where second-hand and high-end shops coexist with martini bars and fast food joints. And even at the height of the Red Mile, it's possible to step barely half a block away from the chaos and find serenity at places like The Foxwood Bed and Breakfast, one of Calgary's jewels.

Not only does the Foxwood offer peace in contrast to the excitement of 17th, it offers a peek at Calgary's history. The Edwardian style house was built in 1910 and, unlike so much of Calgary's history, escaped the bulldozer through the tenacity of caring owners. Over the near century of its existence, it has been put to a number of purposes: home, dorm, women's shelter. Its current incarnation as a bed and breakfast is attributable to its owners Wayne McLean and Brent Rock, who have lovingly revived the building to its former glory. The Foxwood is no museum, mind you; Wayne and Brent have achieved an elusive balance between restoration and renovation. Like a confident old woman who has stayed sharp and adapted to the world as it changed from her youth, the Foxwood reminds guests of the past but doesn't make them feel like they're living in it.

Getting out of the rat race and opening a bed and breakfast is not an uncommon dream, but not many people make the break and try it. Fewer still succeed. Consequently, we should not undervalue the fact that this year marks the Foxwood's tenth anniversary—a decade of success is a significant achievement for a small business! Of course, it's not due to luck. Brent and Wayne did their homework. Even choosing the location was a challenge—they were living in Vancouver at the time and considered a number of locations on the west coast and further inland before settling on Calgary. They could see that 17th Avenue was starting to come into its own and there simply wasn't the kind of competition you'd find on Vancouver Island. They continue to work hard too—owning a B&B is definitely a change in lifestyle, but perhaps not much of a change of pace. Wayne says some of the best advice they got early on from experienced B&B owners was to schedule time off, though it took them a long time to give themselves permission to do so.

Brent and Wayne don't seem to be the kind of personalities who'd be happy just sitting around anyway—they both keep active in the arts. Brent is currently doing the production of *Forever Plaid* at Stage West, and like so many small businesses do, they feel a strong sense of community and try to give back in a variety of ways. They support the ARGRA Rodeo, the Calgary Men's Chorus, and helped put together a benefit for Lou Gehrig's Disease, just to name a few. Even the house has seen some action in that regard—for a couple of years Brent and Wayne decked the halls for the Kid's Help Line *Home for the Holidays* tour and welcomed innumerable visitors to support the 24-hour crisis line. In 2000 Wayne was awarded a lifetime achievement award—although he jokes that it came much sooner than he expected! They're "big into karma" so for the couple supporting others is just a matter of treating people the way they like to be treated themselves—an attitude that undoubtedly encourages repeat business.

This year is not only The Foxwood's ten-year anniversary. It happens to be Wayne and Brent's too—they were married in the United Church in April 1996, the same month they bought the Foxwood. Of course, ten years ago was a

significantly different time with respect to same-sex marriage. Mostly, it seems, for Brent and Wayne, the difference was only in legal status and rarity. It was the first same-sex wedding for everyone involved, but aside from having two grooms everything was...normal. They had originally approached the Anglican church who, locally, would have loved to have married them, but at the time were instructed not to perform same-sex weddings by the *powers that be*; aside from that the process, the planning and execution was the same as any other wedding. It helped, they say, that their families were not just supportive, but excited about the event.

When asked about whether they'll make it legal now, they were indifferent. They've considered renewing their vows this year to make it official but haven't really decided. From their perspective, the important part was the ceremony—expressing their commitment to their friends and family in a respectful way. It's great that the GLBT community has the same legal right now, but being legally married doesn't change how they feel about each other or the commitment they've already made (something some people should keep in mind—the presence or absence of legal marriage doesn't prevent same-sex couples from psychological, spiritual or even religious marriage).

Over their ten years together just off 17th, Wayne and Brent have seen a lot of change in Calgary. They cited 2001 when Joe Clark served as Grand Marshall for the Pride Parade as an important indication. They have never had any negative experiences being gay business owners. That is, aside from one minor incident very early on when they were bizarrely informed that gays "belonged in Bowness" (Who knew?).

The Foxwood's clientele is probably about fifty-fifty straight and gay—they run a B&B, not a gay B&B—and chuckle when occasionally people call and say, "We're straight. Can we still stay?" For some guests, it's their first experience with an openly gay couple. Brent and Wayne just show them the same hospitality, which in turn demonstrates that people are all pretty much the same. The only difference that being gay owners makes is the implicit assurance to gay guests that they won't run into any problems—but of course as attitudes change, that assurance is becoming less and less necessary.

As Calgary's gay community matures, success stories like Brent and Wayne's and the Foxwood's are becoming more common, but that doesn't diminish their power. Regardless of the place, or the job, or relationship model, people who make a living doing what they love, show sincere affection for each other and make a positive contribution to their communities and neighborhoods, lead by example and elevate us all. In that spirit of recognition and celebration, we at *Outlooks* would like to congratulate Wayne and Brent on their tenth Wedding Anniversary and on ten years of following their passion, thus helping to keep Calgary diverse. ▼

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