

BUSINESS

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Entrepreneurs New to Vancouver Island Win Accolades

By Goody Niosi

In the past three years, Carolyn Touhey has started two companies: Two Eagles Lodge, with her husband Steve, and SmartBiz Strategy that she runs on her own. Both have recently been acknowledged in a big way.

Two Eagles Lodge won the Better Business Bureau (BBB) Torch Award for 2010 in the “hospitality” category. The BBB notes, “Each year, BBB recognizes and celebrates regional businesses that demonstrate excellent marketplace ethics and business standards at the Torch Awards. Both BBB Accredited and non-accredited businesses are nominated by their customers for their commitment to honest and ethical business practices and consumer service excellence.”

Commenting on the award, Touhey says, “We’re pretty proud. In fact, we’re still floating. It was quite an honour.”

SmartBiz Strategy won the Comox Valley Home Based Business of the Year Award. SmartBiz is a marketing practice that Touhey brought with her from Maryland. “Anytime you’re recognized by your peers,



it’s huge,” Touhey says. “It’s a huge honour. Both awards were amazing – and I can’t compare one to the other. They’re different and they both come with a great sense of satisfaction, as do each of our TripAdvisor reviews.”

Steve and Carolyn Touhey aren’t just new to Vancouver Island business, they’re new to the country. Originally from Maryland in the United States where she ran a successful marketing business and he was a contractor, they visited Vancouver Island in June 2004 and in their words, “fell in love with the island.” That fall they hired a real estate agent and viewed 70 properties, settling on one that had everything they wanted: 12 acres with an expansive ocean view and room for horses, a garden, chickens and their long time dream: a purpose

built B&B. In 2007 they opened the doors to their first guests. Touhey says, “We love meeting people and we love to entertain. It was something we had talked about doing down the road a bit but when we knew we were getting the property, we decided to get the bed and breakfast going.”

Two Eagles Lodge boasts two very private guest rooms plus a vacation rental. Touhey notes that because the lodge is purpose-built with each room featuring a private entrance and bath, guests can come without worrying about disturbing others. Guests can wander the twelve acres, enjoy a marshmallow roast with their hosts at night or take in activities in the surrounding area. “It’s different from a regular B&B,” Touhey says. Arguably, the guests who stay there and who nominated Two Eagles for a Torch Award think so too. Two Eagles also hosts various events including house concerts, parties for area businesses or groups, weddings, and retreats.

In her other business, Touhey works with businesses that want to be successful and need help with marketing. A recent client who

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wanted to start a home based business needed advice on everything from naming the company to branding, creating a web presence, creating a corporate identity and strategy that is rooted in a cohesive plan. “I work with each client to create and implement a planned approach to marketing as if I were on their staff,” Touhey explains. “But outsourcing allows small businesses to afford expertise that they could not afford in-house.”

“After identifying an owner’s objectives, I help dispel the myth that marketing equals advertising,” she says. “I introduce them to things they can do to stay in touch with their customers – and I do a lot of media relations with them and help them build good relations in the community: a lot of grass roots strategy that doesn’t have to break the bank – it just has to be planned.”

How do a couple of entrepreneurs manage to move, immigrate, and open two award-winning businesses in just a few years? “We work very well as a team, and we share the same vision and life philosophy – work hard to play hard,” Touhey says. “We also manage time well, since running a B&B means knowing a lot about the island to share the ‘secrets’ with guests, we have to make time to play a lot, too.”

Her latest enterprise is My BizBoard that brings together a group of 10 – 14 small business owners that meet once a month and act like a board of directors for each other. The group helps members brainstorm and shares success tips, each one making contributions to the other. The first group has been greeted with so much enthusiasm that Touhey is considering starting similar groups in other locations on Vancouver Island.

When asked about the future plans, Touhey says that she and her husband plan to do more niche marketing to build up the off-season and to get more group business, like the songwriter retreat they hosted last year. She says, “Our central location is perfect for skiers or divers to take weekend getaways. Our beautiful view and open floor plan are perfect for retreats or group events. I need to spread the word, though, so people know we’re here whether they want an alternative to typical event venues or just need some R&R.”

Two Eagles Lodge is at 6409 Island Highway South in Union Bay.

www.twoeagleslodge.com
www.smartbizstrategy.com