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## Fleeing Snow, McCray Found Room (and New Career) at Inn

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Diane McCray left Michigan in 2003 after a 23-year career in the logistics industry, planning moves for other people and companies, including the federal government. She didn't know much about the move she had planned for herself, other than that she wanted to go somewhere where snowfall was not measured in feet. She also didn't know what work she wanted to pursue when she got to this unknown but snowless place.

She credits her real estate agent with finding her not only a new home, but a new career.

Today, McCray is the innkeeper at the Green Palm Inn, a small, four-bedroom bed-and-breakfast on President Street, at the eastern fringe of the Historic District. And while palms are the motif for the inn and are liberally sprinkled throughout its public rooms, at the moment it's high cotton McCray is standing in. Not only is the inn doing well - fall is just behind spring in Savannah's tourism seasons - but the small operation she's been running only four years just got recognition in two national publications.

The inn was featured as "A Quiet Refuge in the Heart of Savannah" in an article that appears in the current edition of American Eagle's Latitudes magazine, distributed on all its flights.

And it also merits mention (along with rival Savannah B&Bs the Gastonian, Foley House Inn, Ballstone Inn and President's Quarters) in the new edition of Fodor's Guide for "Savannah and Charleston's Best B&Bs and Inns."

McCray had occupied "the desk the buck stops at" for decades as a senior planner at a national moving company when she and her boyfriend decided to move south. "We were checking out several cities, and here's where we wound up," she said.

The first plan was to buy some property and renovate it, either for sale or as rental property, as the couple had done in Michigan. But Realtor Dusty Duke showed her the Green Palm Inn and helped drive the idea of a bed-and-breakfast from a passing thought to a serious consideration.

"I cooked my first breakfast on October 1, 2003," McCray recalls, ending a search for a new home and career that began in March of that year.

The circa 1897 building is a duplex. The four B&B rooms are upstairs; the inn's public rooms take up one side of the ground floor, and McCray's home is on the other side.

Because it was already in use as a bed-and-breakfast, a large-scale renovation was not needed. The kitchen was the first thing she tackled, however - renovating for more space so she didn't have to lug cooking gear over from her own adjacent kitchen. More recently, she had the bathrooms renovated and put water-jet tubs in two of the suites.

The furnishings are a mix of antiques and reproductions, both stuff that came with the house and her own possessions and finds. Sprinkled among them are lots of palm-themed items, many of them gifts. The walls feature a couple of artworks from Savannah College of Art and Design students who live or lived nearby.

"One time I was working on my garden out front and a member of one of Savannah's leading bail bondsmen families came by and told me 'if only that porch could talk...,'" McCray said. It turns out, she was told, that the home was built for a couple of sea captains and a large neighboring house was home to a thriving collection of ladies of the evening, who were frequent guests at the seafarers' house.

Innkeeping is a radical departure from the work she used to do, but McCray insists she loves it. She spends her mornings putting together and serving breakfasts like Southwest strata or blueberry bread pudding. Two part-time housekeepers handle clean-up chores, and a part-time student worker fills in a few afternoons a week so she feels comfortable leaving to run errands.

"I live vicariously through my guests. I really don't get out much," McCray said. "When I send my guests off to do something, they come back and describe it, and I feel like I've been there."

She is particularly fond of the family-like status B&B guests can acquire. For example, last week she had a visiting Texas couple who brought along a Flat Stanley. Parents of elementary school children will recognize the popular project - a paper doll sent out on travels with people who help it send back postcards about its travels. The couple sent the student behind this Flat Stanley a card from Savannah, and a couple from Scotland they met at the inn agreed to take the paper project back home with them for the next card.

McCray draws a lot of her visitors, especially the international ones, from the Internet. "Who would have known we could do then, when I started out sending Telexes?" she said.



The innkeeper on the porch of the Green Palm Inn on President Street



Diane McCray