

Hotels as Community Leaders: Two Canadian Examples

Canada happens to be my home, and like the other 33 million residents, I'm proud of my country. Of course, we express this in our own Canadian sort of way: reserved, quiet and without much boasting. On the hotel front, there are some really great things happening in Canada. And by great, I don't mean the creation of more 'soft' or 'lifestyle' hotel brands. Goodness knows we have enough of those. There are some incredible stories of kindness and community spirit being undertaken north of the 49th parallel that underscore what makes my country great. While we've all read about hotel chains rallying their staff (and guests) to make charitable efforts – and these are quite respectable in every way – here are two independent efforts worth mentioning from the 'Great White North'.



Cranberry Village

Located in Collingwood, Ontario about two hours north of my hometown of Toronto, Cranberry Village is the brain child of Larry Law, a gifted developer with a kind spirit and commitment to help – a rarity in these days of *financial pursuit above all else*. As a newcomer to Canada, Larry started by acquiring a 70-room roadside motel, the Cranberry Inn. Over the next twenty or so years, he has expanded this venture by building a series of timeshare and condominium units as well as adding a golf course, a marina, a spa and several restaurants.

By any means, growing from 70 to about 400 units is exceptional for an individual of modest means. What is more remarkable about this growth is Larry's ethical commitment, not just to the community of Collingwood, but to the world at large. In addition to numerous local projects, the entrepreneur spends two weeks each year on a mission to Cambodia to work at and fund a school for underprivileged youth. Just prior to departing on his latest trip abroad, his latest phase of luxury timeshare properties was at a critical juncture in its construction, necessitating many vital and immediate decisions be made. And here

was the owner taking off to a location where cell phone and WiFi coverage were practically non-existent!

His response was unquestionably 'Larry' when he confided in me, "These children need me, and I am sure that only good things will come about during my short absence. My team is able and beyond that, powers greater than me will look after things."

On a local level, Larry has strong ties to his church and supports several outreach programs. He also lends a fatherly 'open door' to employee needs. And from what I have experienced, he rarely if ever takes the owner's prerogative to micro-manage his team. Privately held, Cranberry does not have to report quarterly profits. As an owner, Larry tells me that he records dividends not only in dollars but also in happiness. Through doing business as a platform, he promoted compassion and care, inspiring others to achieve meaningful lives.

Fogo Island Inn

I already reported on this incredible architectural masterpiece called Fogo Island Inn. Located on Fogo Island off the northeast shore of Newfoundland, a trip here will take a day at least, with a connector flight to Gander, a one hour and fifteen-minute drive, and a 45-minute ferry to Fogo. This is not a spur of the moment destination. Nor are its prices!

This 29-room property has been featured in literally hundreds of articles in the media. Fogo has transcended from being an anomaly in the world of hotel development, to a 'bucket list' must-go-to-destination for just about every 1%-er in the world. With no-compromise accommodations, personal services, sky-high and non-yield managed ADR's, Fogo simply defies conventional hotel logic.

But there is far more to Fogo than one of the most iconic hotel buildings on Earth. The story of the Fogo Island Inn goes hand-in-hand with Zita Cobb, the property's visionary leader. For those who have not heard the story, here it is in a compressed version: local girl goes to university; lands in a high-tech super biz; sells her stake; returns home and commits to helping to revive the Island's economy and stimulate its culture.

In the hotel construction world, where everyone seems to pride themselves in how to buy things cheaper, Zita asks, "Can we make it here, or if not on Fogo Island, in the province? If not in the province,

in our country?" In the development of the Inn, she led to the creation of industries that support the community such as local quilters and furniture craftsman. Now with the Inn complete, her groundwork has led to many regional craftsmen being able to sell their products to a much broader audience. Zita recognized that she could not carry the burden of this development solely on her shoulders. That is why the Fogo Island Inn and the peripheral activities generated by this property are all part of the Shorefast Foundation, a registered Canadian charity committed to community development. All profits from the Inn go back to Shorefast and are reinvested in the community. Like many smaller, rural communities, Fogo Island has experienced generations where the only way for kids to be successful was to 'head for the mainland'. While Zita will never say it was her, and as demure as she can be, she'll always point to the Shorefast as the *raison d'être*.

Larry and Zita are two individuals who quietly pursue their roles as independent Innkeepers with a mission above and beyond mere profits. In doing so, their 'guest list' is more than those who simply hand over their credit cards. They are aspirational and are making a real difference each in their own ways. Do you have any other stories of community spirit you can share?

(Article by Larry Mogelonsky, published by [HotelsMag](#) on March 11, 2016).