

## HOMETOWN: Innkeepers Give Dairy Farm Country Charm

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MOUNT JACKSON — The Widow Kip's Country Inn can be tricky to find for out-of-town travelers using GPS, especially in the dark.

"We had a couple who was traveling late at night," owner Bob Luse, 86, said. "The GPS led them to our neighbor's house. They went in, got out a couple of glasses and had a glass of wine.

"Then they went upstairs and started looking in the bedrooms and there were people in them."

"They hurried out and left their computer on the table," Luse's wife, Betty, added, "along with the glasses."

The bed-and-breakfast, formerly a 19th century dairy farm, sits at the end of a twisting gravel incline off Orchard Road in Mount Jackson. For 25 years, the Luses have welcomed Valley visitors from around the world, including hikers, bicyclists and parents of college students.

Guests can stay in one of five bedrooms in the 1830 Victorian house, or in one of two guest cottages called Sow's Ear and Silk Purse.

Betty Luse, 85, said the property used to be Shenandoah County's largest dairy farm until construction of Interstate 81 in the 1950s cut the property from 162 to 7 acres.

The Luses came to the Valley from Long Island, N.Y., in 1991 when they saw the property listed in The New York Times.

"I didn't like retirement, but I didn't want a job," Bob Luse said. "My daughter-in-law threw out [the idea of] owning a bed-and-breakfast. I thought it was a nice way to retire."

The couple bought the property from Rosemary Kip, now 92, the former manager of the Sulgrave Club, a private club on Embassy Row in Washington, D.C.

With the help of a local Baptist minister, Kip had built modern bathrooms, renovated the farm's wash house and chicken coop into guest cottages and installed electricity on the property before opening for business in 1986.

Bob Luse said he and his wife bought the inn "turnkey," meaning everything in the house was included in the purchase, from the brass William-and-Mary insignia trivets over the fireplaces to the Nicolas Lancret paintings on the walls.

As a result, guests walk into a piece of 19th century Virginia upon entering The Widow Kip's.

"We're only 90 miles from D.C.," Betty Luse said. "But it's such a change of scenery."

The Luses have received visitors from as far away as China and Japan. Notable guests include John F. Sorey III, the mayor of Naples, Fla., and Eberhard van der Laan, mayor of the Dutch capital of Amsterdam.

"We always say we have the nicest guests," Betty Luse said. "They like to sit around the table and talk about where they're from."

Some guests have built lasting relationships with the proprietors, including a couple from Northern Virginia who have sent the inn a White House Christmas ornament every year since 1994.

Betty Luse said the Valley's bicycle trails and the Route 11 Yard Crawl are some of the biggest attractions that lead visitors to The Widow Kip's. Additionally, she said, many of the inn's younger guests enjoy the area's increasing number of breweries and wineries.

However, the inn's busiest time is in October, with the combination of travelers viewing the fall foliage and homecoming events at James Madison University.

"That weekend, it's almost impossible to get a room," Bob Luse said.

He said a bed-and-breakfast offers a more unique experience than a hotel or motel.

"All the furniture's the same [in a motel], every room's the same." he said. "All of the [B&B] innkeepers are different. They serve differently and they furnish differently."

After a quarter-century in a venture they originally planned to pursue for a few years, the Luses love their home and their business.

"There's no place like the Valley," Bob Luse said.

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- Caption: The Widow Kip's Country Inn owners Bob and Betty Luse talk outside the inn off Orchard Lane in Mount Jackson. The property was once home to Shenandoah County's largest dairy farm, but has been a bed-and-breakfast since the previous owner, Rosemary Kip, opened for business in 1986. (Photo by Kelly Clark / DN-R) Betty Luse, co-owner of The Widow Kip's, turns off an antique lamp between the first and second floors of the 19th century house. (Photo by Kelly Clark / DN-R) The four-post bed in the Wildflower Room has been in the home that now serves as a bed-and-breakfast since its construction in 1830. (Photo by Kelly Clark / DN-R)

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