

Muskoka Mosaic: Introducing Randy Spencer

By Paula Boon

Randy Spencer loves how his work brings him into others' lives.

"People come here for anniversaries, birthdays, weddings," says the man who co-owns Spencer's Tall Trees Restaurant along with his wife Karen. "You become part of the celebration and part of the memories."

Spencer, who has been a chef for 38 years, says the great thing about living in a small town like Huntsville is that you're connected to people. "You may not know them to sit down and talk, but you see their face on the street and you know them," he adds.

Born in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, Spencer moved to Toronto at age 6. His first impressions of Huntsville were formed from the railway tracks. "In the summer I'd be put on a train at night heading through Northern Ontario to Toronto and wake up in Huntsville when the sun was rising and it was misty," he says, glancing out

the windows of the restaurant. "It's funny: now here I am living right near the train station."

Always sure he wanted to become a chef, Spencer began his apprenticeship as soon as he was old enough, studied at George Brown College, then worked for Holiday Inns International in the Bahamas and Jamaica.

Spencer and his wife Karen first moved to Huntsville in 1980 when he got a job at Hidden Valley Resort, and their children Nicole and Shane were born here. Although Spencer left twice in the next eight years to pursue other opportunities, each time he was drawn back by the place, the people and the chance to innovate.

"I was the first chef in Muskoka to introduce brunch," he says. "I put out feelers as to what people were looking for and started bringing in smoked fish, eel, and seafood. It wasn't your typical eggs, bacon and ham buffet."

In 1990, Spencer took a post at Grandview Resort, where he stayed for a

decade. "Those were some of my greatest years in this industry. Working with Bruce Evans and his family was wonderful. I had never worked so hard, but I didn't mind. We were treated like family," he says. "Bruce Evans was one of my greatest mentors in terms of getting into business. What I learned from him was just amazing: what to do, and how to treat customers. He also taught me to always think of the next step – how to improve."

Spencer bought Tall Trees, a country inn-style restaurant, in 2000. He says he is grateful to long-time proprietors Richard and Giselle Whiteman for their help in getting off the ground.

"I had years of working in the industry, but owning my own business was a whole new thing, and there was a whole new set of expectations for Karen," he explains. "Richard and Giselle helped our family to prosper."

He also appreciates his "four amigos" from his Grandview days, Nick Hay, Bob Shaw, Dave Martel and Keith Walton, for taking charge of the upkeep of the 120-year-old building. "They looked it over before I bought it and told me, 'Yeah, go ahead. There's nothing here we can't fix,'" he says. "I'm a cook, not a fix-it kind of guy, and to this day they guide me."

Spencer credits his staff for playing an important part in making the restaurant successful.

And, he says, he could never have done it without Karen, who manages the front of house, cares for the property's beautiful gardens and takes care of their household as well.

"She can put in more hours than I do," he says.

That's saying something. In the summer, both Spencers work seven days a week, and even in the off-season there's always lots to do. In the past year and a half, Spencer says, he has tried to back away from working 14 hours a day.

"I've become more of a delegator instead of a control freak. That proves as you grow older you grow wiser," he says.

When he's not working, Spencer enjoys relaxing with his two little dogs. "And I have a passion for wines. I study, follow, and collect wines," he says.

At some point in the future, he hopes to start a cooking school, but he's in no rush to do so. "I still enjoy what I'm doing," he says. "There's never a dull moment."

To explore the entire collection of Muskoka Mosaic profiles, go to www.thelifecollector.com.



A PIE IN THE HAND: Chef Randy Spencer, co-owner of Spencer's Tall Trees Restaurant, puts filling into a pie in the kitchen of his establishment.

ROYAL LEPAGE

Lakes of Muskoka Realty Brokerage
Independently owned and operated

Kim Gordon, Sales Rep.
Cell: 705-783-1304

395 Centre St. North,
Huntsville

789-9677

Ken Davis, Broker
Cell: 705-787-6644

NEW LISTING!

OPEN HOUSE
Saturday, October 10, 12 - 2 p.m. – 208 Skyhills Road

Directions: Ravenscliffe Rd. to Skyhills Rd. to #208
2,800 sq. ft. bungalow on a 5-acre lot in desirable Skyhills area. 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, all large formal rooms including huge master with private ensuite and soaker tub, oversized 3-car attached garage, completely finished in ceramic tile with energy-efficient radiant heat.

\$399,000

Don't miss it! - Your Hosts: Kim Gordon & Ken Davis

Please join us for our
2nd Annual Pumpkin Fest

saturday, october 10th
11:00am-3:00pm

\$20 PER FAMILY AND A NON-PERISHABLE
FOOD ITEM ENTITLES YOU TO:

- a children's photo session with heather douglas & a 5x7 photo to go
- treats for the kids
- hot apple cider and gingerbread cookies

Families will also be entered into a draw to win 1 of 3 prizes including:

- Heather Douglas Family Portrait session with an 8x10 photo (Value \$235)
- 1 hour design consultation with Kristine Brigden (Value \$100)
- \$50 North Muskoka House gift card

north muskoka house ltd.
THE KRIS BRIGDEN DESIGN CO.
& heather douglas photography

365 hwy. 60, huntsville 705-787-0330 northmuskokahouse.com

PUBLIC NOTICE BOARD

1012 Dwight Beach Road, RR#1
Dwight, Ontario POA 1H0

phone: 705-635-2272 fax: 705-635-2132

Hours of operation: Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

NOTICE

NORWAY POINT ACCESS

Take notice, that the Corporation of the Township of Lake of Bays will be considering revisions to By-law #08-10 "To designate and regulate public parks and parkland" with respect to parking and docking at Norway Point Access located at #1167 Old Hwy 117 on **October 13th, 2009 at 1:00 p.m.** in Council Chambers at the Township of Lake of Bays Municipal Office.

Interested parties are welcome to attend.

TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS
R.F.Q. 2009-21 REQUEST FOR QUOTATION
Covered Wooden Sign Kiosks

Sealed proposals, plainly marked as to the contents will be received by the undersigned up until 3:00 P.M. on Friday, October 23, 2009.

Township of Lake of Bays
Attention: Susanne Smith - Chair Baysville Horticultural Society
c/o 1012 Dwight Beach Road
Dwight, Ontario, POA 1H0
(705) 767-3145

community-based
strategic plan

Join Other Volunteers at Community Action Planning Day!

Lake of Bays residents have created a strategic plan designed to achieve their vision for the future. Now your help is needed to make it happen. Pick the strategy that is most important to you and join other volunteers for a day of action planning. Mark **Friday October 16th** on your calendar. The planning session will run from 9am to 4pm at the Dwight Community Centre. Please visit www.lakeofbays.on.ca for additional details closer to this date. (Lunch and refreshments will be provided.)

The Strategic Plan is on the Township website along with a questionnaire where you can still add your insights and concrete advice. The Township needs to ensure that the new Strategies truly reflect the whole community's sense of direction. The Plan is being presented for adoption at the Township Council meeting scheduled for Tuesday October 13, 2009 at 1:00 pm. The public is welcome to attend to learn more and show support.

Please contact Stefan at 705-635-2272 to find out more.

Thanksgiving Office Hours

The township office will be closed to the public on
Monday, October 12th, 2009 for the Thanksgiving Holiday.

Mayor, Council and Staff would like to wish everyone a safe and
Happy Thanksgiving!!!

Visit us at www.lakeofbays.on.ca