

InnSeason Resorts: Case Study In Being A Good Neighbor



by Sharon B. Drechsler, RRP

When you talk about the history of Lincoln, New Hampshire with InnSeason Resorts developers Dennis Ducharme and Billy Curran, you'd better grab a mug of coffee and prepare to hunker down. You're going to find their enthusiasm about this town to be contagious enough that you'll want to stay awhile. InnSeason Resorts® is a New England brand of family-oriented vacation resorts that combine the marketing resources of Curran Management Services and its founder, William E. "Billy" Curran, and the development and operations expertise of Dennis M. Ducharme, RRP. InnSeason Management,® Inc.

The two men's lives have become interwoven with the past, present and future of this quaint, New England town. Lincoln has successfully managed to evolve from housing a logging community in pre-Revolutionary War days, to becoming a

mill town in the '30s and now, in its latest iteration, a tourist haven. Tourists and skiers from around the world more than double the town's population in high season. Dennis and Billy have had a lot to do with the town's success in its latest incarnation. Dennis, in particular, had a part in developing two resort hotels – InnSeason Resorts Pollard Brook Resort thirteen years ago and, more recently in partnership with Billy, InnSeason Resorts South Mountain. He has fallen in love with the town and, from all appearances, the feeling's mutual.

The town had the pleasure of watching the two developers revitalize a dilapidated hotel they purchased in 2003, expanding it into the InnSeason Resorts South Mountain luxury resort hotel.

And so, the community was ready to welcome InnSeason Resorts' plans to

raze the old mill that was the last vestige of the town's former source of livelihood. When Franconia Paper Mill closed thirty years ago, the mammoth seven-story edifice and several adjacent buildings were allowed to fall into disrepair. Its massive gray form blights a roadside just off the Kancamagus

Highway. The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Scenic Byways Program lists the Kancamagus Scenic Byway among the nation's top seven.

The largest obstacle these resort developers faced was the site's environmental issues. Part of the planning process included the performance of environmental investigations of the site, including field explorations, soil samplings, test drillings, well monitoring, groundwater sampling and level measurement, as well as other various analyses. It turned out that not only was the paper mill a fire and safety hazard, but it also had an asbestos problem. Dennis and Billy had a choice: they could quietly go about demolishing the building without broadcasting the news about its environmental threat, or they could spend almost one million dollars to do it the right way.

InnSeason Resorts' first move was to have the project declared a Brownfields site through the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides a simple definition: "Brownfields are real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties takes development pressures off of undeveloped, open land, and both improves and protects the environment."

To assist InnSeason Resorts with the cleanup, NHDES would send experts to



InnSeason Resorts[®], a New England brand of family-oriented vacation resorts, combines the marketing resources of Curran Management Services and its founder, William E. "Billy" Curran (left), and the development and operations expertise of Dennis M. Ducharme, RRP. InnSeason Management,[®] Inc.



help monitor the demolition and provide a low interest loan to help pay for the hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of controlled demolition and disposal of asbestos-contaminated material.

Dennis and Billy have been careful to keep the community informed every step of the way by hosting town meetings, filing a community relations plan available to the public and meeting with local and state officials on a regular basis. For example at press time, plans for an April 11th public hearing with at least five privately contracted engineers, as well as NHDES engineers, on hand to answer questions were well underway, as were arrangements for an April 16th press conference. Given the large scope of effort and state-wide interest in the project, it is expected that a number of state and town officials, including representatives from the office of Governor John Lynch, will be on hand for the press conference. The first phase of demolition will begin in May, with completion likely in the spring of 2008. Afterwards, InnSeason Resorts' plans call for the construction of a complex that will house a 170-unit resort hotel, retail, restaurants and playhouse theater, and whose façade will contain many of the old mill's original bricks.

Dennis Ducharme's commitment to Lincoln goes even deeper than this

extraordinary effort to protect the safety and environment of the town. His interest in Lincoln's history has led him to collecting memorabilia, trekking back and forth exploring the town's landmarks and copying 800 black-and-white photos onto CDs. These will become part of the contents for an historical, non-profit library to be housed on the premises.

When asked what inspired this devotion to Lincoln, Dennis warms to the task of describing his affinity for the area. "I've been involved in the Loon Mountain area more than thirteen years, since I participated in developing Pollard Brook Resort," he grins broadly from beneath a sandy-colored mustache. "Although my family and I hail from Cape Cod, Lincoln feels like home to me. The people here have welcomed me as a native.

"Part of my commitment to the community has been to serve on the board of directors of the North Country Center for the Arts. This non-profit group is known for hosting top-rated summer stock theater that attracts professional actors, in addition to high-caliber student and amateur talent."

InnSeason Resorts' plans for the property include donating the footprint for a 300-seat theater to house the center and to support what will become one of the largest conference centers in the White Mountain area.

Adds Dennis, "Many people in our company feel strongly about the value

of supporting both the thespian and historical heritage of Lincoln, as they epitomize the contribution New England has made and continues to make to our nation's culture.

"We feel that on a personal, as well as corporate level, our staff and the company have made a significant contribution to improving the outlook for Lincoln's economy and cultural life. It's been a long time coming: This complex has been a vision for 25 years. It's so heartening to see our sacrifice and hard work finally coming to fruition and to see the statewide interest. We expect to host a major ground-breaking event – certainly marking a milestone for the state of New Hampshire – that will attract guests from every walk, including the governor's office, NHDES and the U.S. EPA.

"Billy and I are committed to making this extraordinary effort. We could have saved a lot of money and cut corners, but we felt if we wanted to sleep at night, we had to do it right."

There's small wonder the town of Lincoln has embraced InnSeason Resorts' principals with such enthusiasm. They've shown themselves to be persons of integrity, who are there for the long-haul.

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