

Spirit of Enterprise

Yurok woman and husband run the Historic Requa Inn in Redwood National and State Parks

BY LYNN ARMITAGE

Even as the U.S. economy struggles to regain strength, hundreds of thousands of undaunted Native Americans are pursuing their dreams. According to the most recent census data, there are about 237,000 Native-owned businesses in this country, which have rung up \$34.4 billion in receipts. In this new biweekly series, Indian Country Today Media Network will profile the inspiring stories of Native business owners who work tirelessly and fight the good fight every day in the marketplace.

Names: Janet “Jan” and Marty Wortman
Title: Owners of the Historic Requa Inn in Klamath, California

Type of business: Bed-and-breakfast

How long in business: 2.8 years

Original investment: \$875,000

Advice for other business owners: “Forgive yourself for making mistakes because you are going to make a ton of them!”

When Jan Wortman was growing up on the Yurok Indian Reservation in Klamath, California, she and her family used to drive by the Historic Requa Inn and say, “Wouldn’t that be neat if we owned that place someday?”

“Someday” finally arrived for Jan in February 2010 when she and her husband, Marty, bought the Inn after relocating from Portland, Oregon. “When my daughter Geneva moved home to the reservation, we decided to move back, too,” she said. They were looking for a business, and, as fate would have it, the inn was up for sale.

“The asking price was \$1.2 million,” said Jan. “We got a steal for \$875,000.”

The sentimental value, however, is priceless. The 98-year-old bed-and-breakfast, which sits on the banks of the Klamath River in the middle of Red-

wood National and State Parks, is also on the Yurok reservation. The *Requa* in its name is a Yurok word meaning “mouth of the river.” “This has been our home for time immemorial,” Jan said. “My grandparents met at a dance hall across the street from the Requa Inn in 1917.”



The 98-year-old bed-and-breakfast

The 10,000-square-foot, 12-bedroom inn needed some freshening-up when the Wortmans took over. Two of the rooms were completely out of commission. “We renovated those rooms right away, and just by doing that, we increased revenue by 20 percent the first year,” Jan said. So far, they’ve invested about \$50,000 in renovations; the biggest expense was a \$14,000 coat of paint on the outside.

During high season, the innkeepers employ 15 people, mostly locals from Klamath, and 10 are Natives. Marty, a non-Native, works full-time at the Lucky 7 Casino in Smith River

as a maintenance supervisor, then pulls another shift at the inn fixing faucets, patching holes and whatever else is on the “Honey-Do List”. Geneva, who works full-time at a nonprofit organization, helps her parents when needed. The Wortmans’ son, Thomas, is head chef at the inn’s restaurant, Bailey’s.

“We started offering dinners, and people really, really love the food,” Jan said. (Dining accounts for about 10 to 15 percent of total revenue.) Thomas cooks organic, locally harvested food to help support local farmers, and puts his unique spin on traditional Yurok recipes. With the Klamath River in their back yard, salmon is a staple on the menu.

“They’re hauling out 35-pound salmon out of the river, and that’s what my guests have for dinner!” Jan gushed.

Guests visit from all over the world. “It’s really unusual to go one night during peak season where we don’t have someone from another country,” said Jan. Word has spread about the Requa Inn and its down-home hospitality. In 2010, it earned a Fodor’s Choice distinction from Fodor’s Travel.

What Jan likes most about running the Requa Inn is sharing her tribal heritage and stories with guests, and seeing how happy they are to be there. “Every day you see that excitement in their eyes because it’s so beautiful here. You can’t help but always be in a state of gratitude and abundance.”

And she plans to run the inn under the family name as long as good fortune allows.

“My family has been on this hill, falling in love and having babies, for generations and generations, so I would love for that to continue on,” she said. “We joke that if we ever get tired of running the inn, we’ll end up with a 10,000-square-foot house on the banks of the Klamath River.”

Spirit of Enterprise is a biweekly series spotlighting Native entrepreneurs.