

# Acorn Inn offers guests Southern hospitality

Steve Earley  
Reporter

Whether you are a guest or just stopping by for an open house, Acorn Inn owner and operator Mike Brown will offer you a cup of coffee as if you were a guest in his own home.

This is because the inn is sort of his home. Brown runs the inn, located two blocks from Elon's campus at 301 W. Haggard Ave., along with his wife, Melissa, and his parents, Jimmy and Becky. The family has living quarters above the inn's porch.

Melissa says it was a goal to give the inn a homey feel. "When people think of the South, and of Elon, they think of hospitality," she said. "I want that to carry over to the inn."

The 10,000 square foot facility opened Nov. 9 and features 12 double occupancy suites. All rooms are non-smoking and have a fireplace and sitting room with a fold-out love seat, whirlpool tub, micro-

wave, refrigerator and king-size bed.

Both Mike and Melissa attended Elon, so they know the area. "We recognized there was a need for overnight stays closer to the university," Mike said. "[If you] want a little more peace and quiet than I-40, and don't want to fight Williamson Avenue at 5:00 p.m.... then this is the place."

Starting up a new business has kept the family busy, according to Melissa. "It's like another baby for us," she said. The Browns have a 2-year-old daughter named Mikayla.

"We wanted to do the owner/operator thing," Mike said. "It's good for the business to get it jump started yourself, let people meet you."

Running a business has made for some long days. Melissa, who handles a lot of the publicity for the inn, also works full time at Southern Alamance High School. She gets Mikayla off to school in the

morning, helps with breakfast, answers phones and does anything else she can.

Mike generally starts each day at 5:15 a.m., gets in a swim or a run and is at the bakery to pick up breakfast by 6:30 a.m. Once breakfast is cleaned up, and the rooms are changed over, Mike takes reservations and bookkeeping items during the day. He said he usually finishes up around 10 p.m.

Planning for the inn began in November 2000. Building required a special-use permit, which meant the idea had to be approved by a planning board, just as if it were rezoned. "People's perception of something on paper versus what the end result is going to be is often times different. So, it makes it difficult," he said.

Once it was approved, the inn took about four months to complete. The building is Mike's design and a refinement of the Affordable Suites extended stay units he owns in Graham.

"This building [Acorn], we're already looking at it for our fourth project," he said. "What would we change? And what can we do to make it better? It's an ongoing process."

So far, business has been fair, according to Mike. "It's always more of a reality check when you're living out what was on paper," he said. "It's pretty close to one track, honestly, but, it feels a lot longer now that you're really living it out." March looks good for business. "It's starting to shape up nicely," he said.

Mike says parents of students and others visiting the university have made up a good part of business. He says they also get a lot of people on business visiting either Lab Corp or Carolina Biological Supply Co.

Mike says once the inn has been introduced to the university, this is a market he wants to pursue more. "We're going to go more directly after outside businesses," he said. "We want to expand out into the community."

In addition to Mike, Melissa and his parents, the inn has a part-time staff of five. Mike says there will



Photo courtesy of Steve Earley

Acorn Inn is a home away from home, located on 301 W. Haggard Ave.

always be one full-time person, onsite all the time. Currently, that happens to be him. "I'm on the verge of probably hiring a bookkeeper/office manager-type person, just to aide in the day to day tedium, so that I can get out and sell the rooms," he said.

Two Elon students, juniors Ryan Buckley and Marcie Foley, work at the inn. Both started before the inn opened to the public, and they say they have enjoyed the experience. "It's great. Mike is probably one of the best bosses I've ever had," Foley said. "He's very understanding and works with your schedule."

Buckley, who helped with some of the construction, said, "I enjoy being able to help them out. It's not like a chore."

Both Foley and Buckley are communications majors, but they say their experience at the inn will still come in handy down the road.

Buckley, a broadcast corporate communications major, says he has learned a lot of good marketing strategies from the inn. Foley said, "I've learned a lot about how to deal with people and keep people happy. That's important in any job you do."

The importance of the customer is something Mike can attest to. He ran the Bike Shop of Burlington for six years before selling it in 2000. He says no matter what business you are in, "It all comes back to serving the customer, he said." "Even when you sell a product, you sell yourself. People will buy that product because you endorse it."

He says this is also the most rewarding part of the job. "It's just those little things when you connect and you know the customer sees value in what you have provided them," he said. "That is the most rewarding."

Rates for the inn are \$79 per night for two people Sunday through Thursday, and \$99 per night Friday and Saturday. The inn's phone number is (336) 446-0400.

THE POSITIVE IMAGE SALON

## \$5.00 Off

**ANY SALON SERVICE**  
With Coupon  
*Students Only*  
\$16.00 minimum service

**"Voted Best Salon In Alamance County"**

**Offering:**  
\* Body Wraps \* Facials  
\* Hair \* Nails \* Tanning  
\* Color \* Perms \* Waxing  
336.229.4247

Monday & Friday - 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.  
Tuesday thru Thursday - 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.  
Saturday - 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

1066 S. Church St.  
Burlington, NC