

BED AND BREAKFASTING IN THE FOX RIVER VALLEY

Written by June Grayson

Who said you can't go home again? That writer obviously never visited the Fox River Valley. Seven family homes and two small inns offer winter vacations that will warm your heart without whittling your wallet. You won't even need to help with the dishes.

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Romantic nature lovers like BARBARA B'S BED AND BREAKFAST

near Barrington. Les and Barbara Ayres will show you to your private suite in their hillside ranch. Barbara changes the linens and accessories, many of which she has made herself, to match the seasons and holidays.

Eat a hearty breakfast on a tray in your room or by the crackling fire in the den. Join the family in the breakfast room with its antique copper collection and home grown herbs.

The view from your picture window overlooks a wildlife conservation area teeming year around with plants, birds, and animals. You can follow tracks in the winter snow. A deer, or even a red fox, may brush against your window. In spring, enjoy the fragrance of thousands of apple blossoms and bulbs. The herb garden flourishes all summer. In fall, flaming wild sumac brightens up the marsh.

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Five years ago Rich and Barbara Helm spent a glorious weekend at a Galena, Illinois, bed and breakfast. Monday morning they saw a for sale sign on a rundown Queen Anne Victorian house two blocks off Woodstock's city square. By Monday evening, they owned the house, naming it the BUNDLING BOARD INN.

They had to replace all interior partitions and utilities

except the original solid oak staircase. Fortunately, both Rich and Barbara are professional woodworkers so they could share the drudgery.

Custom antique molding from a New England mansion now accents the parlor. A stained glass artist (also their dentist) made new transom windows of frosted and beveled glass in Victorian designs.

In Colonial America, strangers shared the same bed with only a "bundling board" between them. You won't have to share a bed but you may share the help-yourself Continental breakfast with international guest artists performing at the famous Woodstock Opera House.

"Being a bed and breakfast host is fun," Rich says. "We were lonely after our eight children left home. Now we always have wonderful people around us."

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The STRATFORD INN in Sycamore, Illinois, may be the only B&B to encase an old mansion. In 1925 Mary Whittemore, spinster owner of the mansion, sold her home with the restriction that she would be allowed to remain in it for life.

Developers built a three story hotel around the house. Now, several remodelings later, what remains of the mansion and its

ornate woodwork has been converted into four luxurious suites, the most popular one with a loft bedroom and a Jacuzzi bath.

Thirty-nine additional rooms, lobby, and conference rooms blend the elegance of an English Manor home with 20th century amenities. During the week, a restaurant and lounge are open in the building. On weekends, you can eat a continental breakfast in the lobby.

If you want to attend special events at DeKalb's Northern Illinois University or bike the 26 mile Great Northern Bicycle Trail, this inn's for you. It's not too soon to reserve your room for Sycamore's August Corn Festival and Steam Power Show or the October Pumpkin Festival.

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Howard and Donna Petersen own the COUNTRY CHARM INN south-east of Sycamore. A farm girl, Donna has always been a nurturer to her 14 younger siblings, her own children and AFS students.

"We treat our guests just like family," they say. At times, they have even given up their bedroom to accommodate additional guests.

City families like to come here. No wonder! This sturdy farm home boasts a new family room with sunken seating in front

of the huge fireplace, an oversize TV screen, and a commercial popcorn popper. Brightly painted barns shelter the animals: lambs, goats, dogs, turkeys, kittens, and even a performing horse.

Donna will serve any special medical diet you need. Otherwise, you will feast on her special egg and cheese souffle served with applesauce muffins.

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The CHARLESTON GUEST HOUSE in St. Charles is home for Judy and Bill Schultz and their two children. Guests can choose to stay in the Victorian Room, Country Room, or Grandma's Room on the second floor of this lovingly remodeled Queen Anne Victorian. Judy serves an extended continental breakfast sometimes featuring her freshly-baked cheese coffeecake.

The business district, restaurants, and antique stores are within walking distance. Plan ahead for reservations on the first weekend of every month when the Kane County Flea Market (the world's largest?) holds sway a mile away on Randall Road.

Don't fail to notice the 9,000 antique pink bricks that Bill and Judy hand laid for the new driveway and parking area. The exterior rose trim of the house and even the spring-blooming magnolia tree match the driveway.

One couple reserves "Grandma's Room" once a year to fly in from Connecticut to attend the flea market and browse the antique stores.

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If you like the genteel ambiance of "old money," you'll love the OSCAR SWAN COUNTRY INN on Geneva's west side. Hans and Nina Heymann have converted this Colonial Williamsburg estate into a luxurious B&B in demand for bridal parties and special events. A Florida family has reserved the entire building with its seven guest suites to celebrate their wedding anniversary this coming summer.

For breakfast, you'll eat a fresh herb omelet served in the 15 foot tall, glass conservatory overlooking the seven acre garden. Nina will plan, arrange, and cater any party or reception you may want.

Choosing one of the seven special guest suites may be the hardest thing you have to do at the Oscar Swan Inn.

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Julie Green is the general manager of the WHEATON INN on Roosevelt Road. Only two years old, the inn already has the

warmth and graciousness of a Williamsburg Colonial home.

Corporations in the high tech corridor astride Highway 88 reserve rooms for their most important foreign visitors. Meeting rooms and catered meals attract business seminars and service club luncheons. On weekends, romance reigns when wedding receptions and parties fill every hour. Wheaton College, Morton Arboretum, Cantigny, and Fermi Lab are nearby.

Enjoy a full buffet breakfast every morning in the dining room. At bedtime, the aroma of freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies entices guests to socialize in the parlor before retiring. Freshly brewed tea and coffee are available on demand 24 hours a day.

Julie has scheduled three murder mystery nights: January 26, March 23, and April 27th. If you're lucky, some reservations will still be available when you read this.

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Dawn Dau is your innkeeper at Naperville's HARRISON HOUSE, owned by Neal and Lynn Harrison. Dawn, a school teacher on sabbatical, wants you to make the Harrison House your second home. "This is my home, and I want everyone to be happy here," Dawn says.

Amish and Victorian antiques vie for your attention.

Carry your lavish breakfast of blueberry muffins, Denver melts, spinach omelets and gourmet coffees to any one of the antique golden oak tables in the dining room and parlor.

All Naperville attractions are within walking distance: the Burlington Northern train station, North Central College Campus, Naper Settlement, the River Walk, and downtown shops and restaurants.

Call Dawn and ask her what special "family" party she is planning now.

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Don't let the two-story Colonial facade of DIE BLAUE GANS (The Blue Goose) fool you. Inside you will find yourself in the Tyrolean Alps. You may even hear the Sound of Music echoing through the halls.

The Konrad Family Singers - Don, Molly, and their seven children - have performed throughout the world singing Bavarian folk songs and old American favorites. Now that the children are grown and Don has retired, the Konrads have converted their large home to a guest house.

Steven Lee, local artist and family friend, has decorated the entire house in Tyrolean style. You'll eat breakfast by

candlelight with the family's finest silver and linens to complement the European recipes Molly whips up each morning.

In mild weather, take your breakfast tray out to the gazebo.

Steven painted the gazebo's ceiling to immortalize special family events. The pet geese will serenade you from their backyard pen.

Europeans think that geese make the best of pets.

"We love having our own bed and breakfast home," says Molly.

"Every time we expect a guest, it is just as though we are planning a special party for a special friend."

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