

Idyllic SLT bed and breakfast changes hands

By Kathryn Reed

Cooking for two instead of 20 – that’s what Jerry Birdwell is looking forward to. Learning to cook for 20 is something Rachel Carlson is going to have to figure out soon.

Carlson and her husband, Greg, as of March 15 are the owners of the Black Bear Inn in South Lake Tahoe. It will reopen April 14.

It was on March 5, 1999, that Birdwell and Kevin Chandler opened the inn. The couple moved from Texas with no prior bed and breakfast experience. One was a lawyer, the other in the computer industry. What they created was an iconic lodging establishment that this reporter believes served the best breakfast anywhere on the South Shore. The only problem, as it were, was you had to be a guest of the inn in order to dine there.

Just like the original owners, the new ones also come without lodging or kitchen experience.

“I don’t think anyone can cook breakfast as well as Jerry did,” Carlson said. She said they are researching options for breakfast. Her specialty is baking.



The Black Bear Inn in South Lake Tahoe has new owners.
Photo/LTN

Carlson's background is marketing. Friday will be her last day at Heavenly Mountain Resort. Greg Carlson will continue to work for Kirkwood Mountain Resort in the human resources department.

For now, the changes they plan to make include new linens – all white. The early evening wine and cheese will no longer be offered. The website and logo will be updated soon.

Most of the furnishings are still there – which include antiques and rustic items that in some ways give the Black Bear an old Tahoe feel in an upscale way. The inn has five rooms in the main lodge-type building, with three cabins in the back – one being a duplex.

“One of the things we know that is special about the place is the charm and character. We really want to make sure we keep the heart and soul of the place,” Carlson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

But they also want do more contemporary things like pop up and wine dinners. The plan is to bring chefs in from Reno, Sacramento and the Bay Area, and winemakers from Sonoma and Napa to offer guests and Tahoe residents a culinary treat.

During the Birdwell-Chandler regime, "The Bachelor" was twice filmed at Black Bear Inn. Photo shoots were common. Dinners were a brief offering for guests and locals.

Being community oriented is the Carlsons' goal. They want the Black Bear Inn to not just be for people who are spending the night.

For Chandler and Birdwell, they will now be spending much of their time at their ranch in Sutter Creek that they bought a few years ago. They also plan to buy a cabin in town, so they aren't really leaving Tahoe for good.

For the Carlsons, the Black Bear Inn is now their home and their job.

In many ways the two couples share similar goals for the inn. Birdwell was the co-founder of the Ski Run Business Improvement district that was able to get the sidewalk, lamp posts, curb and gutters in on the street.

The Carlsons want to expand on the vibe to make Ski Run a true destination for locals and tourists.

"I will say that knowing the people on Ski Run who are living and working and planning for the future of the street, and having heard what is in the pipeline, I'm very excited for the future of Ski Run. Big things are ahead," Chandler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The guys hosted multiple political fundraisers and weddings for friends.

Expanding the inn as a wedding venue is a goal of the new owners.

In the end, it's all about the guests. Both couples know that.

"We have guests who got engaged at the inn, and others who chose BBI as their wedding venue. We helped them create life memories, and that is very rewarding," Chandler said. Some of the guests have become friends.

Carlson is already looking forward to meeting the people who are booked for this spring.

"Something we are really excited about is connecting with people from all over the world and sharing our knowledge of the area," Carlson said.