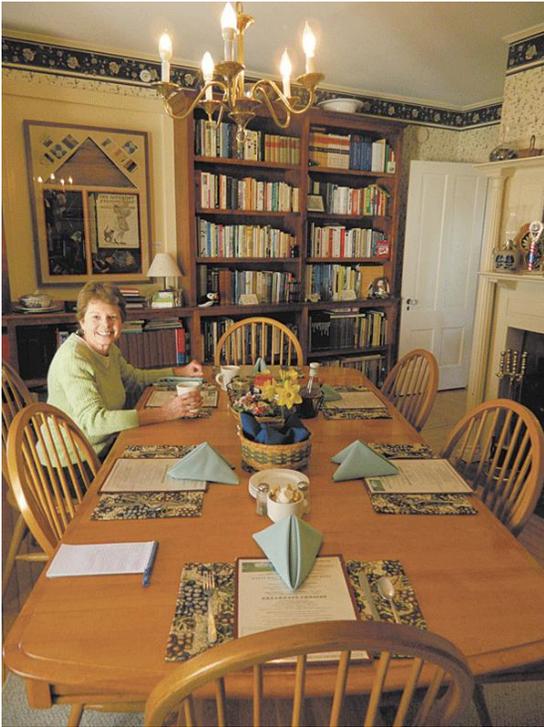


Thursday, May 3, 2012



Historic Hallowell has it all

by George and Linda Smith

Our 24-hour vacation included elegant lodging at Maple Hill Farm Bed & Breakfast Inn, a superb dinner at the Liberal Cup and a morning spent in the interesting shops. If you haven't spent any time in Hallowell lately, you may be unaware of just how much Maine's smallest city has to offer.

Maple Hill Farm Bed & Breakfast offers every convenience and a breakfast cooked to order

George

I expected nothing less from Scott Cowger, an exceptional former legislator and staff member of the Department of Environmental Protection, and owner of Maple Hill Farm with his partner Vince Hannan. But I was stunned by the innovative environmental systems at this remarkable bed and breakfast.

The inn received a Governor's Award for environmental excellence, was the first certified "environmental leader" Maine green lodging establishment, and was selected as the Best Green B&B in 2011 by Yankee Magazine.

I've been wondering if environmental investments really make a difference to travelers, and I got an answer at the breakfast table on Saturday morning. A New York City couple, in Maine to visit their daughter at Kents Hill School, told us that they seek out green establishments when traveling and really appreciate Maple Hill Farm's environmental commitment.

We appreciate that too, and I also appreciated the large number of turkeys spotted in the field outside the window of our beautiful room as I enjoyed a cup of coffee.

And here's a good example of the inn's effort to make your stay enjoyable and unique.

Scott keeps a turkey call at the front counter to entertain guests, but hadn't had any luck getting gobblers to respond. So of course, I grabbed the call and invited him outside for a lesson. One squeak of the box call resulted in a string of loud gobbles in the nearby woods!

On our Friday afternoon tour with Scott, it was clear that the farm's history is also an important element of this place. A piece of Hallowell granite — cut on the farm and originally used as the front steps — is now the inn's front counter.

From the inn, you can walk a woods trail to nearby Jamies Pond — protected thanks to the good work of the Kennebec Land Trust — or linger near the barn and enjoy the antics of Vince's Llamas.

From our name on the door of our room, to the sauna and hot tub just outside the inn's back door, to the fridge full of desserts, to the incredible breakfast, everything here is created to make your stay relaxing and special.

I could live here. Well, actually, our friend Rep. Bob Duchesne does live here during the legislative session. Lucky Bob!

I could also live at the Liberal Cup, or at least take all my meals there. I have in fact eaten many times at the Cup, but

this was Lin's first visit. Now she knows what I've been raving about!

Start with one of the Cup's exceptional beers, brewed onsite. I favor their darker beers including the Tarbox Cream Stout and For Richer or Poorter, while Lin liked the lighter We All Scream Ale and Old Hallow Ale IPA. And yes, we sampled them all!

The place was packed on a Friday night, even though we arrived early at 5:30 p.m., but we didn't wait long for a small table in the back room. We were pleased to meet Mr. and Mrs. Richard Nale of Waterville, seated in a nearby booth, when they reached over to tell us how much they enjoy our travel columns. People do travel a distance to eat here.

I've never had a bad meal here, but this dinner was special. The chef sent out a fried goat cheese appetizer that was extraordinary, and some fried clams — nicely battered and not overdone — with a super tarter sauce.

For an entree, I selected one [of] the night's specials, a whole roasted beef tenderloin wrapped in applewood-smoked bacon, with whipped potatoes topped by black truffle butter. It was very good.



Linda

Okay, I knew Maple Hill [Farm] B&B was the place for me as we checked in and were talking to Scott. A small bird feeder was attached to the window for the closest look at a chickadee or goldfinch you're likely to get! Scott went on to explain that a webcam is aimed at this feeder. Check it out on their website.

As you drive up the steep [hill](#) to Maple Hill Farm, the first thing you'll see is a huge red barn surrounded by llamas. This is not your average B&B. The inn overlooks an enormous field bordered by beautiful stone walls. You truly feel like you have arrived at a country sanctuary.

Rooms at the inn are tastefully decorated with pleasing color schemes. Every convenience is there for you — a gas fireplace, couch and nice comfy chairs, a beautiful bath with a Jacuzzi hot tub and shower, and fresh flowers on the bureau. The bathrobes provided are the most comfortable ones in the world, satin on the outside with an ultra soft lining. Step out of the Jacuzzi and put this on and you'll know you are pampered.



We could see the 126 solar panels (and 202 tubes for hot water) on the roof from our room. It looked pretty darned cool and, with a small wind tower, provides 40 percent of Maple Hill [Farm]'s electricity.

There is a living room for guests where you'll find a library of books. The Gallery Room is used for [breakfasts and] small meetings and overflow from their two annual dinners at Easter and Mother's Day, and is filled with amazing artwork by many local artists, all of which is available for sale.

Maple Hill [Farm] has another business offering meeting spaces at their Conference Center (for 150), and Carriage House (for 50). If you've ever been to an event there, you already know how beautiful it is and how fantastic the food is! Sonia at my hair salon suggested we visit here and write about it. She raved about staying here for a wedding.

You will not believe the breakfast that greets you in the morning. A wood fire crackles, and muffins, juice, cereals, fruit and coffee await. Your breakfast entrée is made to order.

Though pancakes, French toast or eggs are available, we both got Eggs Benedict Arnold. The eggs come from their own chickens. I declared their Eggs Benedict perfect due to amazingly crunchy English muffins and great hollandaise sauce.

Dinner on Friday night at the Liberal Cup was a real pleasure. The Cup's manager, Jess, was also our server, and

provided good guidance — which you'll need because the menu is extensive and the dinner specials, particularly on weekends, are intriguing and creative. That night we had a wide range of possibilities from pork to shrimp to steak to monkfish.

I ordered a regular menu entrée, the Drunken Pot Roast, slow roasted in the Cup's own brew. This is not your mother's pot roast. Chunks of beef rest in the most delicious gravy ever. With garlic smashed potatoes and

squash, this is comfort food at its best for less than \$10!

The food comes out really quickly. I don't know how they organized the kitchen, but it's clearly a well-oiled machine in there!

For dessert, their cheesecake, made in Portland, was tempting as were the four selections of berry pies, but we were out of appetite and shared the chocolate tiramisu, a delicious ending to a great meal.

These were 24 great hours in a great (but small) city. And a very short ride from Mount Vernon!



Hallowell's Liberal Cup has fresh brews on tap along with a great menu

IF YOU GO . . .

MAPLE HILL FARM BED & BREAKFAST

11 Inn Road, Hallowell

www.MapleBB.com

800-622-2708

The inn offers small and large spaces for meetings and conferences, and provides really great food for those gatherings, including weddings.

THE LIBERAL CUP

115 Water St., Hallowell

www.theliberalcup.com

MAD-BREW (623-2739)

Lunch and Dinner seven days/week. Music twice a week, plus trivia night and other activities. This is a lively place with a bar and separate dining room.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.historichallowell.org

The city's Museum in the Streets program, a walking tour of historic Hallowell, is fascinating!

The Travelin Maine(rs), George and Linda Smith of Mount Vernon, have spent their lifetimes enjoying all that Maine has to offer. Now they'll tell you all about it — their favorite inns, restaurants, trips, activities, experiences, and travel books and websites — in their own personal style. They'll be offering anecdotes, tips and all the details you need. So join them in exploring, experiencing and enjoying the great state of Maine.

Visit George's website: www.georgesmithmaine.com for travel tips, book reviews, outdoor news and more.