

Nominated Company

Name(s): Northern Edge Algonquin Inc.

Nominated Individual Name(s): Todd and Martha Lucier

Nominee's Title/Position: Co-Founders and Owners

Name of Award Category for Nomination: Sustainable Tourism Award

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Name of Person Making Entry: Dr. Nancy Arsenault

1) Describe how this business or individual has promoted a more sustainable approach to tourism or has offered sustainable tourism product to the traveling public.

Passion, vision, and an unwavering commitment to environmental sustainability, all wrapped up in memorable guest experiences are just the tip of the iceberg at Northern Edge Algonquin (*The Edge*). As a leading Canadian and international example of sustainable tourism excellence this company has it all.

From the beginning, the “Edge” was established as a beacon of sustainable with an eco-friendly design and targeting Ontario travelers. Today, 4 hours outside of Toronto, this rural 8-acre paradise welcomes diverse guests from around the world from a Toronto corporate retreat (traveling via the Northland Express train) booking to the group of Shamen Monks from Peru.

Their commitment to sustainability and the environment is pure, motivated by their values, not a response to the current day interest in sustainability now popular with government and in the public eye. At the *Edge* they quite literally live their learning, share their way of sustainable living with travellers, and as a small business - the backbone of our industry - they operate a business that generates a healthy income to raise a family, employ people in the local community, contribute to industry and take the time to educate others along the way. A fundamental approach to this involves the integration of “sustainability of place, of community, of environment, of people”. Their eco-lodge and programming exudes these fundamentals.

Celebrating people and place, showcasing Canada’s finest natural environment, and connecting with the preservation of nature guests are transformed as they spend time at this very special place - I know I visited!

In 2009 - 2010 this company:

- Installed Canada’s first commercial bamboo floor

- Realized their recycled boardwalk installed in 1995 did not need repairs or paint for 16 years - the quality surpassed expectations and the local builder no longer sells it because of the product's longevity which isn't good for their business!
- Harvested raspberries from their earth roof
- Built and christened a clay and straw bake oven designed by their chef
- Completed their recycled heritage log cabin which now accommodates additional guests and adds a second kitchen on the site
- Expanded their garden to grow vegetables, herbs, joined a local community supported agriculture project with Dalew farms; and their chef established an additional off-site garden for additional local food production.
- Todd was one of 200 individuals from Canada selected to attend Al Gore specialty training on climate change, along with Dr. David Suzuki -- and in exchange for the training, committed to a minimum of 10 free speaking engagements to share the world and motivate others
- Todd was invited to Nashville and represent Canada's tourism industry at a three-day summit on sustainability

Their Business Ethic

Where passion meets purpose, the owners, staff and collaborating partners work and play with an attention to sustainability and responsibility in everything they do. Guests are welcomed into this eco-retreat and become an intimate part of this unique world. They have all of the modern amenities, including wireless Internet access, electricity, an exceptional kitchen, and a variety of sleeping accommodations - except that they have approached it fundamentally from a sustainability, low ecological footprint, and integrating smart business tactics at the same time.

Their original vision had the courage to be different - they design facilities, trails, gardens and activities around connecting people with nature, conversation and reflection.

A Sustainable Business Model

Values-based, customer-focused, with an emphasis on partnership and generating shared wealth. Like many businesses that begin, Todd and Martha used to employ more people, but that becomes expensive in a seasonal business and living in a small town of 1000 people, the ideal staff member isn't always found.

A few years ago they shifted from hiring the local yoga instructor to partnering with her; the same for the photographer and many others. A shared revenue model means that other businesses benefit and can grow, thus contributing to the sustainability of others and the community. Moreover, this business model is an inspiring approach to fostering entrepreneurship.

Quite simply, they collaborate to compete in meeting the needs of the guests and in their approach to marketing.

Memorable, Social, Educational Guest Experiences

Awesome programs, people and intriguing places to stay create the tourism offer at Northern Edge Algonquin. From inspiring canoe trips, to adventure guides, wilderness art teachers, yoga

instructors and retreat facilitators Todd and Martha carefully consider who their facilitators and experience providers can be. Their objective is to offer their ideal guests programs that offer transformative value; they plan programs and facilities to meet that need - always with an eye towards sustainability and responsible tourism.

An attention to detail in their facilities is evident in the shapes of their buildings that do not conform to the traditional 'rectangles' of modern day building. Octogons, curving trails, and a modest physical infrastructure footprint create intimate, unique programming spaces for guest activities and spaces to 'just getaway'. Everything has been built with purpose and meaning and links to the types of programs they offer. You will not have a typical board-room retreat with tables, chairs and endless power point presentations for your retreat. Rather you will have carefully crafted conversations, reflection time and team building events that foster cooperating and understanding.

At the *Edge* they can feed up to 50 people in a day, yet they operate without a dishwasher! Their chef is a key member of their team, growing local foods, designing low food-mile menus, with local and organic ingredients and creating exciting dishes - some of which you even get to prepare yourself! They have a hand-built outdoor oven, where the chef prepares the pizza dough and all the fixings and you build your own pizza with everything from eggplant to special homemade sauces, then one-by-one, they sizzle and cook remarkably quickly in this incredible oven while guests chat up the chef; you think about how food was prepared in the 'olden days' and you engage in lively conversation on the nearby wooden tree-stump stools or gather around the fire to share stories

Food is more than eating, it is a carefully crafted place for story telling and through the chef, the appreciation for local and sustainable foods comes through loud and clear. It is about creating a conversation about food and dining. So too is 'doing dishes'. Simple acts such as doing dishes, chatting with a family or friend, become part of the guest responsibility, yet they participate freely and travel down memory lane, laugh and giggle, and voila - yes they do their own dishes and don't mind!

However everything that goes up, must come down, and the food we ingest must depart in some form. They have everything from basic compost toilets you would expect, to high-tech modern ones that come with a fascinating educational briefing about how to use them, and how they work with nature. Strange as it seems, it is a part of the experience and one that gets you thinking more clearly about our human impact on the planet's finite resources.

Their Infrastructure and How It Is Tied to the Guest Experience

This solar powered nature retreat, located on 8 acres of privately owned forested land, west of Algonquin Park is tucked away along a long dirt road, 20 km away from the nearest commercial hydro sources. The journey to the resort itself is a step into nature; the beginning of connecting with nature, appreciating the exquisite natural assets Canadian has in abundance. This is the quintessential Canadian experience in northern Ontario.

From an accommodations perspective this resort could be traditionally described as an "eco-lodge" with two levels of accommodations, sleeping capacity of 40 rooms, located on a

picturesque waterfront property in an area that provides privacy and peace. What would be missing from this description is the infrastructure that focuses on preserving place and connecting people to nature and the thoughtful investments that we talk about today as 'sustainable' but these guys have been doing this for 20 years -- well before it was in vogue.

They operate with:

- A fully solar powered operation, 2800 watts of solar panels
 - you learn and appreciate energy conservation in your electricity consumption, the amount of energy it takes to heat the water in a shower
 - you can change the direction of the solar panels and learn from Todd about what is involved in living 'off the grid' Here it is not concept, it is a way of life.
- No televisions, radios or plastic 'game boxes', rather hiking trails with interpretive messages, carefully designed garden areas for quiet reflection and 'breathing in nature'
- 600 feet of shoreline that offers opportunities to contemplate, swim, or in winter go snowshoeing on the lake.
- An earth roof that grows raspberries! Very cool
- A fully rebuilt 100 year old heritage log cabin
- Modest rooms with natural lighting, compost toilets, German style comfortable duvets and a great bed with pillows for an excellent nights sleep. If you prefer to tent - they created, what I like to call a 'Baby-Boomer City Girl' camping set up where you get four wooden walls, and a canvass roof over your head, but you can set up your sleeping bag and have some protection and privacy. And of course for those who truly want to be outdoors they have covered areas to pop your sleeping bag. Regardless of the type of sleeping accommodation you choose (for comfort or price point) everyone gets to participate in the activities and food experience, and enjoy the property.

Edgy Marketing

As a small business, in a rural area, with a niched product, this company markets via the Internet thus diminishing the impact on the environment of print communications, direct mail distributions, and ads in magazines that carry a heavy carbon foot print associated with their transportation. They host media writers, lead the charge in cooperative marketing and believe in collaborating to compete in raising the profile of Ontario, eco-lodge experiences, canoe and kayaking experiences on pristine waters. Stories form the foundation of their marketing and with social media - the ME in social media is focused on the guest, their stories, their experience and sharing it with the world. This builds credibility, leverages their voice as a small business - and through a highly targeted niche market strategy to business development, they expend only the resources required to reach their 'ideal guest'.

2) Describe the impact to the bottom line of this business or more broadly to the industry as a whole of adopting environmentally sustainable practices or offering more environmentally conscious products.

Economically they run a tax contributing business that generates a steady year-round income for the owners, and several members of their community. They bring partnership business to the

community and invest locally. They involve family members in the business as well as multiple long-term partners.

Socially, they contribute to the knowledge of the industry through training off-site and education on-site. Todd is one of the facilitators at the Gros Morne Institute for Sustainable Tourism where he teaches experiential travel and community tourism development and uses his property, guest experiences, community and province to anchor many learning moments. Martha is committed to educating about Shamanism and creating a community for learning and reflection that attracts people from around the world; her workshops and courses generate steady repeat business and adds a unique group of visitors to the community.

And environmentally, the property is a living learning example of sustainable business - one with a vision led by the heart and commitment to the environment and the protection and celebration of special places.

For me personally as a tourism educator and business developer - what I am inspired about when I think of Todd and Martha's business, their passion, and commitment to community is what a wonderful example of an SME (small/ medium enterprise) that can showcase the excellence of Canada's responsible tourism business, unique guest experiences.

SMEs are Canada's hidden tourism gems. They are polished and shine, they are rare - and as such, people do not always know about them. Large city voices with big stakeholder bases are not aware of them - yet they are part of what makes Canada, Ontario, and the little town of South River special. They do not carry the large flag titles of hotels, they do not have large budgets and staff for sustainability initiatives, yet they are an example of excellence from which we can all learn. They take risks where others shy away, and they hold true to their beliefs. They are a living business model of a responsible, sustainable tourism business. I knew about their eco-lodge for years, I finally had the chance to visit, learn, enjoy and engage and I know I will be singing their praises and telling their story for years to come in my tourism training and education activities.

On behalf of all hidden gems, SME that go unnoticed despite their alignment with government objectives, popular public opinion, and travellers interests; I strongly encourage you to celebrate the 20-year history of Northen Edge Algonquin and their contribution to Ontario and Canada's tourism industry.