

## Island Entrepreneur Brings Maryland Touch to Award-Winning Businesses

*By Greg Pratt*

The Island business community is getting familiar with Carolyn West-Price Touhey's name. And for good reason: she's a tireless entrepreneur with not one, but two, award-winning businesses.

But the accolades haven't come easy, and it's been a long, strange trip indeed that's brought Carolyn, her husband Steve, and her businesses (one of which is co-owned with Steve) to the Island from her previous Baltimore, Maryland home.

Back in 2004, Carolyn and Steve found the island on a business trip to Vancouver, where she was giving a seminar at the annual convention for the Association of Teleservices International; after a couple trips back, they bought "12 acres of trees and debris and then applied for immigration while an excavator worked his magic here," says Carolyn.

"The Valley seemed perfect," she continues. "It was less congested and big box-y than Nanaimo, and Qualicum was too retirement-oriented, although beautiful. Parksville was too congested. So this fit the bill. And being skiers, this was just thirty minutes from our door to the mountain. There was just so much that hit us."

They then went through a grueling immigration program, sold their house in the States, designed a house here and lived in a travel trailer while the house was being built, all

the while with Touhey continuing to run her old US consulting business. Steve got to work breaking ground on the bed and breakfast addition to the house, and permanent residency was finally achieved at the end of 2007.

"The first guests arrived when paint was barely dry and we looked like weekend warriors on those HGTV shows," chuckles Carolyn.

And so it was that the two ended up doing business in Union Bay. And doing that business involves two very different companies: SmartBiz Strategy and Two Eagles Lodge, which both operate under the parent company of Two Eagles Enterprises (Two Eagles Lodge is the business co-run with husband Steve).

SmartBiz Strategy specializes in small business marketing and public relations. The business recently received the Business of the Year award from the Comox Valley Home-Based Business Association.

"I get a lot of satisfaction out of it," says Carolyn about SmartBiz, "because most of my clients are small, entrepreneurial businesses, not corporate entities. You're working with a business owner who has a vision, and has a lot invested in it, and you're able to be that marketing director for a small business that otherwise couldn't afford to hire somebody at that level. And it's creative; I have fun with the creativity, especially



*Carolyn and Steve Touhey are proud recipients of the 2010 Better Business Bureau Torch Award in the hospitality industry for all of Vancouver Island.*

with grassroots marketing. If a client doesn't have a lot of money, your only resource is creativity."

Utilizing knowledge gained running SmartBiz Strategy, the seemingly inexhaustible Carolyn has also taught marketing-related courses at North Island College, local Chamber of Commerces, and at Campbell River's Community Futures and Opportunities. As it turns out, getting the teaching work wasn't that hard at all for Carolyn.

"I saw that North Island College had no courses and the Chamber didn't teach many courses like the ones back in Maryland did, so I went to both of them and told them I have all these years of experience teaching," she says. "North Island Continuing Ed asked me with open arms what courses I would like to teach and I gave them a menu of some I had put together."

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Then there's Two Eagles Lodge, the husband-and-wife team's bed and breakfast. Two Eagles Lodge recently earned themselves the Better Business Bureau's award for business ethics and community involvement.

"If I didn't like to entertain, it'd be tough," says Carolyn about the sometimes non-stop schedule that running a B&B alongside another business entails. "But I love to entertain."

Carolyn and Steve also love the rural life. The two are chicken farmers and

often have a booth set up on the road where people can pay for farm items with an honour system drop box. And then there are the steamed crabs, which have become a favourite part of the Two Lodges experience for many visitors.

"Maryland is famous for its steamed crabs," says Carolyn. "Everyone, it seems, in the rest of North America boils their seafood. We brought our steam pots and go buy live crabs in the shell and get this seasoning called Old Bay, it's kind of a red pepper

based salt seasoning. You pour it all over them and the bottom of the steamer, you put vinegar water and maybe a bottle of beer depending on who the chef is, and you steam them."

"We teach people, sitting on the deck, how you pick these and eat them," she continues. "We're not the typical B&B, so instead of sitting there roasting marshmallows, we sit there and eat crabs. It's a little bit of our old life thrown in for good measure."