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Hosts Share a Look at a St. Ignace Airbnb

Perrys Rent Out a Single Room, Consider Themselves Ambassadors for St. Ignace

By Stephanie Fortino



Rick and Kathy Perry with their son, Todd, and dog, Reilly, at home in St. Ignace Sunday, January 14. The couple have been Airbnb hosts since 2016, renting out a guestroom at the encouragement of their son, who is a frequent Airbnb user when traveling with friends.

hotel.”

While in St. Ignace visiting his parents, he’s been staying in the guestroom that’s listed online as tourist lodgings during the summer. During the rest of the year, he lives and works in Antarctica.

In 2015, Rick and Kathy Perry moved to St. Ignace from Rochester, New York, and by 2016 the couple had become an Airbnb host. Encouraged by their son, Todd, who uses Airbnbs when traveling, the Perrys listed their guestroom online on an afternoon in late June 2016. Within hours, they had their first booking.

Motivated by a desire to meet new, interesting people and welcome them to St. Ignace, the Perrys were drawn to the idea of being hosts, seizing upon the newest trend in which people can book a guest room online in someone’s private home, or the entire home or apartment. *(See related stories in this issue.)*

For their son, staying in local people’s homes while traveling provides a different and unique experience from staying in hotels.

“It’s not just a room with a bed,” he said. “With Airbnbs, there’s character. They’re infinitely more appealing than a

Visiting Mackinac Island is the main draw for people staying in St. Ignace, Mr. and Ms. Perry said. While hosting guests, they act as ambassadors for St. Ignace, sending their guests to local restaurants, museums, and other attractions. The couple has even joined the St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce and include regional promotional materials advertising local events and sites in the room. While guests are staying in St. Ignace, the couple encourages them to visit Tahquamenon Falls, Whitefish Point, Sault Ste. Marie, and other places within driving distance, in addition to the Island.

Mr. Perry's brother and sister-in-law own a traditional bed and breakfast in Ann Arbor, and when preparing their home for guests, they sought their suggestions to make the room more accommodating to visitors. Changes included removing the old, mirrored closet doors, adding a desk with a few books, a television, and a miniature refrigerator stocked with bottled water. They invested thousands of dollars in their home, including updating their front porch and entrance, equipping the front door with a keypad for guests to use.

Airbnb was founded in 2008 and has had more than 200 million guests. There are more than three million listings, including about 1,400 castles, in more than 191 countries throughout the world.

As a host, property owners can list a whole property for rent, a private room like the Perrys have, or a shared room. Guests book stays and pay for the rentals through the Web site, so hosts don't have to invest in a point of sale system or handle transactions. The Perrys have to pay for home improvements, cleaning, and food costs.

It takes the couple about an hour to flip a room for the next guest, including providing new bed and bath linens, dusting, cleaning the bathroom, and vacuuming. Sometimes new guests arrive the same day as other guests leave. Guests have to check out by 11 a.m. and check-in is at 3 p.m.

Airbnb charges a fee on top of the rate hosts charge. Guests pay for their rooms up front, and the hosts receive their portion of the payment on the morning the guests check out. The company only issues IRS 1099 tax forms for self-employment earnings to hosts that earn \$20,000 or more a year.

"We're not even close to that," Mr. Perry said.

In addition to private homeowners like Mr. and Ms. Perry, other vacation rentals overseen by property management companies, traditional bed and breakfasts, and others post rentals on Airbnb to gain more exposure, Mr. Perry said.

An advantage of Airbnb, Mr. Perry said, is that the company also provides additional liability insurance. And the program is easy to get out of, added Ms. Perry.

“The nice thing is,” she said, “we can just say, ‘We’re tired of this,’ hit delete, and the listing is done.”

The Perrys provide a complimentary hot breakfast served on their deck that overlooks Moran Bay, since their home isn’t located within easy walking distance of a restaurant.

They also have restrictions on who can stay, allowing only two people at a time, no children, and no pets (but they do let guests know about their own dog, Reilly). Guests also have to stay a minimum of two nights.

The couple has the option to refuse guests, Ms. Perry said. One feature of the program is that guests are allowed to review properties, and property owners can review guests in return. For example, hosts can say whether a guest was messy, loud, or destructive, clueing in other hosts on their experience. The Perrys are considered “super hosts,” meaning they’ve earned all five-star reviews.

The first guest at the Perry home checked in July 1, 2016. The couple hosted people through October. During their first year, they had 23 bookings for a total of 45 nights, with 73% of available nights booked. Last year, they started allowing threenight and four-night stays; they again had 23 bookings for a total of 58 nights, making for 81% of available nights booked.

This year, they plan to only allow two-night and three-night stays during June, July, and August. The weather is too intermittent in September and October, she said, and their rates are more expensive than local hotel rooms after Labor Day.

The Perrys have hosted an array of people from Michigan, Alabama, Georgia, Missouri, Iowa, and Minnesota. Some were experienced users of the service, while others had never stayed at one before. Included were artists participating in local art shows, people in the area for a wedding in Cedarville, and even an Airbnb host from Colorado.

“Everybody’s interesting,” Mr. Perry said, “because they’re from all over.”

Overall, being a host has been a positive experience, the couple agrees, and only two of all the guests they’ve had would not be welcome to stay again.

While the City of St. Ignace doesn’t have any regulations for short-term rentals or a registration process, Mr. and Ms. Perry met with Mayor Connie Litzner and the staff at City Hall before they listed their guestroom for rent.

As a member of the St. Ignace Planning Commission, Mr. Perry has been thinking about short-term rentals and how the city might want to regulate them in the future.

“I am all for local regulations, not just for short-term rentals,” he said. “Anybody living and working here has to have safe and appropriate accommodations, make sure they’re not

cramped, have emergency egresses. It's all about life safety and a decent place to live, from an ordinance standpoint. It applies to more than Airbnbs, or it certainly should.”

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