

Sonia Adlys

For many years now one of Waterloo's most distinguished heritage buildings has been stripped of the panelling, artificial stone and drywall that until the 1970s hid the beauty of the original Huether Hotel.

With every window that was unblocked and historic cavern that was excavated, a little bit more of the heart and soul of its co-owner Sonia Adlys have been revealed.



Adlys and her husband Bernie now stand at the centre of the renaissance of the majestic 1842 building on the corner of King Street North and Princess Streets. Their dream of selling their own beer and creating a casual place for people to enjoy a good meal has been realized.

Adlys first came to the Huether Hotel as Sonia Skrypec, a 16-year-old girl looking for a job as a coffee shop waitress. It was the Hotel Kent in the late 1950s when she arrived, and the manager of the coffee shop was Bernie Adlys. The owner of the hotel was Bernie's father John, who had purchased the building in 1953.

Within a year, the spirited young woman married Bernie and together they decided to make the hotel their life. During those early years, Adlys learned the business from her husband, doing every job in the hotel. Over the years she has "made beds, cleaned toilets, mopped floors, worked in the kitchen, bartended, and waitressed."

In 1975 she and her husband purchased the building with the help of a \$200,000 mortgage and a commitment to working twelve to fourteen hour days. The couple had four school-age children at the time and Adlys once said, "It was very scary for us. But everything fell into place with hard work and togetherness. We just did it."

Today, Adlys' four children work alongside her and her husband in the family business. Her two eldest sons, Kelly and David, were instrumental in the early renovations of the building, saving the family money by doing much of the work themselves. They are now the family brewers. Her daughter Christina and youngest son Bernie Jr., also help out. While all four attended post-secondary education, each returned to the family business.

"It's every mother's dream. You don't want your kids to ever leave you. And these are great kids who work really hard," she said.

While the building itself with its Lion Brewery Restaurant, Speakeasy Billiards Room, Barley Works restaurant, Hop Garden Patio and Café 1842, is a testament to Adlys' determination and vision, there are other initiatives that reveal her passions.

Sonia Adlys had heard local police officers talking about an organization that helped abused children that did not receive government funding. So in 1993, the same year she

was named an Oktoberfest Woman of the Year, Adlys decided to raise funds for the group by creating and selling a signed print of the Huether Hotel as it would have looked in the late 1800s. Six years later she reached her goal and handed the money over to Citizens Concerned with Crimes Against Children.

The Adlys family business attracts a wide cross-section of Waterloo people, and there are many regular customers. Each year the “regulars” are invited to share in a free Christmas dinner. It is Sonia and her family’s way of saying “thank you.”

Photo courtesy of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record Photographic Negative Collection, University of Waterloo Library.