

Achieving Greatness in Tasmania

By Lyell Wells

With curriculum vitae that read like a culinary Who's Who, John and Lee Bailey are achieving great things in the Tasmanian holiday village of Swansea.

The industry here is tourism and the owners of The Banc Restaurant are a double feature which will attract many visitors as their fame spreads and they provide that necessary component for any successful tourist town: a good restaurant.

"We've made a professional commitment to the restaurant, the town and to the training of competent staff," Lee said, leaving no doubt as to her own competence.

"We see the locals as our bread and butter and want to nurture them as customers."

Lee was introduced to John by her brother, Andrew Christie, 23 years ago at the Noosa International Hotel where John was the executive chef.

Lee has been 'in hospitality' and tourism since 1977 yet retains the exuberance and - dare I say it - beauty of her youth. Always in the front desk position, Lee was a conference organiser before she joined Wrest Point as Events Manager, which later included organising the Corporate Tower Club.

John was President of the Chef's Association of Tasmania, Director of the Australian Culinary Federation and a member of the Chaine des Roitisseurs.

John's longer road from his birthplace of Bolton, England, to Swansea included stay overs at the Athenaeum Club and Sheraton Hotel Hobart, Palm Meadows Golf Club Queensland, Kosciusko Alpine Hotel, Sydney's Regent Hotel, The Dorchester London and a 'consulting experience' for Raffles Hotel, Singapore.

From 1997 onwards, John became John T Bailey food consultant and, later, John T Bailey Pty Ltd culinary advisory and catering service. His principal clients included Lactos and Butterfields.

"We can organise anything," John said when speaking of his intention to continue catering services from The Banc.

"Events, parties, weddings, conferences, including hiring of marquees, furnishings, decorations ... the lot - clients can walk away with ease knowing we can handle it all."

John and Lee arrived in Swansea at a time when the town's catering ability for the tourist traffic was in distress because the local pub had burned down. How many tourists went hungry or poorly fed we'll never know, but Swansea's reputation for hick-town 'like it or lump it' attitude was frequently berated.

Today, a new pub is operating and a second with planning approval secured is under way while another restaurant being built in the middle of town is near completion and promises to attain The Banc standard.

It could be that Swansea will earn a Parisian reputation among tourists situated as it is among excellent wine, seafood, farming and pastoral providores. The local produce inspires chefs of John's calibre.

The Banc Restaurant has two especial features, being the garden area for alfresco dining and a more formal dining room annexed from the restaurant (The Vault) and with seating at one long, curved candlelit table for up to 14 diners. Many successful dinner parties have already been held in The Vault where Lee and John may practice their penchant for charm and personal service.