

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

DOW JONES

News Company

MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2014 - VOL. CCLXIII NO. 74

WSJ.com

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## SECOND ACTS

### Home at the Inn



THINKING ABOUT what you might do after a first or primary career is one thing; actually working toward that goal, with a detailed blueprint, is another. Selena Einwechter didn't want her vision of running a bed-and-breakfast to remain a dream. So she spent a decade planning every step of her shift from corporate marketer to innkeeper.

Ms. Einwechter started in 1999, while still working as an executive in the lottery industry. She sent a letter to everyone she knew telling them of her plans to open a B&B in five years. Friends pre-bought nights at the would-be inn, enabling Ms. Einwechter to collect \$10,000 in startup capital. But it wasn't enough.

"In 2004, when I hit the five-year mark, I realized I had nowhere near enough money to make my dream come true, so I recommitted to opening in five more years—and then I got serious," says Ms. Einwechter.

#### B&B R&D

She learned about the stock market and started a women's investment club. She lived simply and socked away half

of her salary. She created a business plan and attended B&B conferences. She had an architect draw up floor plans, since she intended to build an inn instead of buy an existing building.

Her favorite part of the planning phase was scouting for locations. For 10 years, she toured the Southeast on weekends looking for the perfect spot. She found it in western North Carolina.

"I fell in love with the rolling hills and historic sites scattered throughout the Asheville region," Ms. Einwechter says.

To make absolutely sure she was cut out to run a B&B, she asked an innkeeper in the Asheville area if she could work free as an "apprentice."

"She thought I was a bit crazy, but she could tell I was serious," Ms. Einwechter recalls.

So began a three-year immersion in running a B&B. Every possible weekend, Ms. Einwechter made a three-hour drive from her home in Atlanta to work at the inn. She loved the experience.

Ms. Einwechter had planned to open her inn in 2009, but in 2007 she was laid off. Losing her six-figure salary earlier than

#### Selena Einwechter

**AGE:** 59

**HOME:** Mills River, N.C.

**FIRST/PRIMARY CAREER:** Marketing executive

**NEW PATH:** Innkeeper

**WHY THIS PATH:** "Ever since I backpacked across Europe after college staying in bed-and-breakfasts, I dreamed of opening an inn one day."

expected put a dent in her savings goal, but she wasn't deterred. With a seven-month severance package, she gave herself three months to find a property. Right on schedule, she became the owner of 6 acres of rolling woodland. She set to work building the inn. And in June 2009, the **Bed & Breakfast on Tiffany Hill** in Mills River, N.C., opened for business.

#### Greet and Repeat

Today, the inn employs nine people, runs at 70% occupancy and is turning a solid profit. The focus is on personalized service; as such, the inn gets lots of repeat guests.

"If I find out someone loves M&Ms, I put a bowl in their room; if they mention they love waterfalls, I print a map of waterfall hikes in the area," says Ms. Einwechter, who lives on the property in a separate house.

The job consumes most of her time. Even on days without guests, there's work to do: upkeep, marketing and more. Looking ahead, she hopes to find ways to take time off. But retirement isn't part of the picture. She plans to run the inn for as long as she's able.

"I encourage anyone with a dream to make a plan and get going," Ms. Einwechter says, "because you can't achieve your dreams sitting on a couch."

—Kristi Essick