

The Old Mill House Inn...life is good!



By Evangeline Doyle

My first stay was New Year's Eve 2006, and the fireworks going off in the distance couldn't have been more appropriate as I sat in the chaise and read the note Brooke VanMeter (proprietor) wrote me; thanking me for staying and explaining the beautiful treats that sat chaise-side on a small antique table (chocolate and peanut butter bon-bons, date-filled and angelica cookies). A great way to begin the New Year!

As I curled up in bed with some favorite magazines (Brooke thinks of everything), I was overcome with joy that something this wonderful is now at the disposal of visitors, friends and family that come to Vernonia.

The proprietor, Brooke (Crowston) VanMeter, is not a stranger to most in our community. She is a fourth-generation Vernonian, and many of us grew up knowing her parents, who came from rough beginnings and turned around difficult times to give their own children the best life possible. Her mother Patty, who died of cancer in 1993, was a gracious, tender-hearted woman. Her dad Gordon, wanted to give back to the town that took care of him as a youth, and he did so in many ways – as a teacher, counselor, vice-principal, athletic director, coach and every underdog's advocate. And some (like me) also attended school with her older brother's Gordy and Kris. She is the wife of David VanMeter, a builder here in town, and mother of two girls, Summer and Nandi. Brooke is also active at the high school with 7 years of service coaching girl's volleyball.



As I walk up to The Old Mill House Inn for our interview, on the porch sits three small bricks that say "life is good." And given that flowers, hot coffee, and treats awaited me on the porch – I couldn't have agreed more! Fascinated by Brooke's ease, warm style and great decorating sense – I asked what influenced her -- she said, "Family, parents and friends...and a husband that can swing a hammer!"

As for decorating, "My mom was very traditional," Brooke said, "everything had to match...and then I met Leilani and Rietta." Her new mom, Leilani, also a gracious hostess – is a woman with a great sense of humor. She helped Brooke broaden her horizons and realize everything doesn't have to match -- if you like it, someone else will too – listen to yourself. Leilani is also quite an artist – her handiwork can be seen on a wall in The Lilly Pad room. Then there's Brooke's 14-year friendship with Rietta Behnke, also of Vernonia. This was by all accounts, a most unlikely friendship, but one that blossomed. Brooke, very sports-oriented, had never heard of lemon curd and had only experienced Lipton black tea. She met Rietta when they were neighbors – Rietta opening her home for traditional high-tea every Tuesday to

It's something out of a magazine...that was my first impression when I walked into The Pebble Creek room at The Old Mill House Inn. It was the first time I had returned to 487 Arkansas Avenue, since my parents sold the house in 1986. Although it felt quite strange walking up the stairs, once inside, it was hard to imagine that this could have been anything other than part of a beautiful bed and breakfast.

anyone in town that wanted to join in. Relaxed and gracious, Rietta had the ability to turn ordinary to extraordinary – and Brooke paid attention, learning about entertaining and how to not take herself too seriously.

Although this is Brooke & David's first bed & breakfast, you'd never know it. Brooke said they'd always had people stay in their home over the years, and thought why not stay at home and do something she loves. Brooke and David took sixteen months to renovate this 3,000 square foot mill house property. They have done an amazing job that's generated equally amazing results!

There are a total of three rooms at The Old Mill House Inn. The room I stayed in, and the first to be finished, is called The Pebble Creek. Brooke painted it in pastel colors, and decorated in such a way that when she walks in it reminds her of her surrogate grandmother, Zada Snook, who lived in Vernonia on Pebble Creek road. The second room has been affectionately named The Crow's Nest. Growing up, the Crowston's had a gazebo in their backyard with the same name, and Brooke



wanted something to honor her family and let them know how much they mean to her. The third and final room is The Lily Pad. Given the namesake of the Inn, Brooke wanted a room that reflected the old mill pond, what is now Vernonia Lake. This room is botanical and cozy, complete with hand painted walls, and electric fireplace.

Each room has its own bath with shower, and access to drinks, treats and books on the same level. Downstairs in the kitchen, Brooke whips up a phenomenal breakfast for her guests and serves them in the formal dining room.

Bed and breakfast customers are often looking for an experience vs. lodging. Something cozy and comfortable – more intimate with the proprietor and community they're visiting. Most people wanting a bed and breakfast experience will get this and more at The Old Mill House Inn, and guests coming to learn more about Vernonia won't be disappointed!

The Old Mill House Inn is located at 487 Arkansas Avenue in Vernonia Oregon – near the Pioneer Museum. It is Vernonia's first traditional bed and breakfast where someone has transformed their residence to accommodate visitors. We hope this is the first of many businesses like this to open in Vernonia. To learn about rates, or to book a room, contact Brooke VanMeter at 503-429-0952.