



Chance meeting led to dream job in Coast rainforest

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New managers of The Narrows Escape Rainforest Retreat Michael and Karen Cross with the owners Joanne and Mark Skinner.

Warren Lynam

LITTLE did Karen and Michael Cross know that a chance stopover at a Montville bed and breakfast would end up making their dreams come true.

And they weren't even staying there. They had simply stopped in to say hello to friends Mark and Joanne Skinner, the owners of The Narrows Escape.

They left as the new on-site managers.

"I met the Skinners years ago when I was working for Tourism Sunshine Coast," Karen Cross said.

"(That day) we had been for lunch at a winery and I thought we should pop in and say hello to Mark and Jo. We drove into their place and were surprised to see it was for sale.

"We started chatting and said we'd be happy to become residential managers. It was out of the blue. But it was meant to be.

"Michael's wish always was to run a resort, so our dreams are coming true."

Mrs Cross said she was keen to continue building on the award-winning foundation laid by the Skinners, who remain the owners.

"Mark and Jo have done an amazing job taking their property forward, developing national and international markets.

"By having us come on board, it allows them to continue to develop the business and to travel nationally and internationally marketing not only this business, but the Sunshine Coast."

Mr Cross is a former small business owner who ran a small resort on the Coast. Mrs Cross has a background in sales and marketing in hotels, resorts, tourism and attractions, such as UnderWater World.

She said they had overseen the property's third record-breaking month, with very few vacancies since December.

Mr Skinner said it was a momentous decision to make the call to leave the property.

"It's your baby and no one else can love it like you do. So making the decision was quite tough," he said. "But once we met Michael and Karen, we saw they had the same philosophy with regard to customer service and treating guests with respect.

"We are delighted with what they've been doing. They've gone through the toughest month in Sunshine Coast tourism with flood and famine, and they are doing really well."

Mr Skinner said the new arrangement would provide freedom to market the business.

"All the things we've done in a piecemeal way, like social media and agency marketing...you do those when you can. When it gets busy they fall to the side. But now we can concentrate on those. That will add value. It also gives us the opportunity to develop international markets."



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