

CHECKING IN

Emerald Lake Lodge a jewel of Field, B.C.

KIM GRAY

FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Last week, we visited Pat and Connie O'Connor — founders and owners of Canadian Rocky Mountain Resorts — at their condominium in southwest Calgary.

The dynamic husband and wife duo spoke to The Herald about what it means to have their “pride and joy” — the Emerald Lake Lodge — listed in this month’s Conde Nast Traveler magazine.

The honour? The accommodations — which were purchased by the O’Connors in 1980, but originally built in 1902 by Canadian Pacific Railway — have been named recipient of the Readers’ Choice Awards for Top 100 destinations in the world.

In the Canadian resort category, Emerald Lake Lodge, located near Field, B.C., on the picturesque shores of a small glacial lake, was listed in fourth place after three other B.C. accommodations: King Pacific Lodge, the Wickaninnish Inn and Long Beach Lodge Resort.

Our conversation with the O’Connors — who have been married 39 years and have four children and five grandchildren — went beyond this latest distinction.

We addressed the challenges of running a family business, their sincere love of mountain life and what the downturn in today’s economy means to them.

Q: Tell us about your reaction to the Conde Nast Traveler listing.

Connie: I was ecstatic. I thought ‘They finally found us.’ I’ve always thought that Emerald Lake was one of the most precious places in the world.

Q: What does the recognition mean to you?

Pat: It means our efforts are finally paying off. It’s a challenging property because of its remoteness; it requires huge capital in order to run.

Q: What are the implications of a listing such as this?

Connie: We have a staff of about 90 people out there. Our head chef, Alistair Barnes, says everyone is excited and proud.

Q: Talk to us about being a husband and wife team. Emerald Lake Lodge is just one of your properties. There’s Banff’s Buffalo Mountain Lodge and Deer Lodge in Lake Louise as well as several restaurants in Calgary.

Pat: We have different talents. I’m at the front end — looking at construction development, real estate and design opportunities.

Connie: I work with people and run the properties on a day-to-day basis. This includes painting, colours, fabrics and furniture replacement.

Pat: Sometimes challenges come in. Replacing our sewage treatment plant at Emerald is going to cost about \$1 million. That restricts spending we have available to us in Connie’s field.

Q: How did the two of you meet. A guy from Calgary. And a girl originally from Cleveland, Ohio.

Pat: We met as freshmen at the University of Colorado. I won’t go into the details. They’re embarrassing. Let’s just say Connie was a very

warm person. We had fun on every date.

Connie: Pat always made me laugh. This is very important to me. I grew up in a family that laughed a lot.

Q: What’s your attraction to mountain life.

Connie: I can still picture the looks on my own children’s faces when they would summit a glacier. They would beam. I really feel that (mountain experiences) give people a new feeling of self that is improved and more positive. This carries through in everything you do in life.

Q: How, as business owners, do you plan to weather the economy’s downturn?

Pat: We look to our repeat customers, many of whom are Canadians, in a downturn. We want to ensure we’re servicing them properly. We always try to achieve this in boom times, but it’s even more important now.

Q: Your condo has an unbelievable view of Calgary’s skyline to the north and an even more incredible view of the Rockies to the West. Tell us



Photos, courtesy, Jennifer Tv

Pat and Connie O’Connor were ecstatic that their “pride and joy” was chosen as one of the top destinations in the world

about your ties with Calgary.

Connie: I used to think that if something happened to Pat, I’d go back to the U.S. Now, I don’t think I could ever leave. No matter what happened. I love Calgary. I love the blue skies and I love waking up and looking at the mountains. This is my dichotomy.

Q: What kind of legacy do

you hope to leave people?

Pat: This involves all of properties we have to date — most of which are historical in nature. I hope we have improved them and left them in good condition for future generations. If we’re good stewards, then this will be case. I expect we’ll be judged on this one day.