

The Cloud Hotel

Finding yourself in the Forest

Owner of the award-winning Cloud Hotel, Avril Owton – acknowledged in the tourism industry via the SHINE Woman of the Year 2006 award – has been focusing on what makes a wonderful and memorable holiday for visitors, whether they are first-timers or returnees. Hotels can advertise fine dining and everything from an extensive spa to tea/coffee facilities making in the room, but in stating the obvious they can overlook what is right on the doorstep. Here at Brockenhurst, it's a stunning view across the New Forest National Park, where wild ponies graze peacefully and the light alters magically throughout the days and evenings as the seasons change. "There is so much to do which adds up to a sense of well-being, starting with a walk breathing in pure fresh air, taking a packed lunch picnic, which we can provide. Enjoying the New Forest's special ambience creates a relaxing holiday. The walking is wonderful and something I adore, whilst guests may prefer horse riding or cycling. Both are peaceful ways to see the surrounding countryside and provide an opportunity to get off-road away from any busier areas, because summer is a popular time," said Avril. Summer visitors to The Cloud Hotel frequently make a beeline for the renowned New Forest and Hampshire County Show, which takes place from July

24-26. Open from 8.30am to 7pm, with free parking and a pay-as-you-go shuttle bus service from Brockenhurst mainline station, this year's main ring attraction is the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery. First held in 1921, the show is one of the highlights of Hampshire's social calendar, bringing traditional country pursuits, new exhibitions and demonstrations to a unique setting. "It's rated amongst the top 10 agricultural and equestrian shows in the UK, and makes a glorious day out," said Avril. 'Relax, explore, enjoy' states www.thenewforest.co.uk, the official website of New Forest Tourism. Keep an eye on it if you are coming to stay at the Cloud, which is ideally situated for so many attractions, whether long established such as Exbury Gardens or the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu, or a personal guided New Forest tour covering charming villages or the bustling coastal town of Lymington. The New Forest Museum is also nearby at Lyndhurst. "History and geography can be readily discovered," concluded Avril, "but the Forest's spiritual dimension has to be experienced."

'Do we really sell the well-being benefits of this location?' said New Forest hotelier Avril Owton, "I do wonder...'



Full English please!

Val Phillips has retired from the Cloud after 11 years working as breakfast chef as well as preparing desserts, scones and the cakes for afternoon tea.

"I cannot imagine how many cooked breakfasts I served in a week, let alone 11 years," said Val, who lives in Brockenhurst with her husband Terry.

Breakfast chefs tend to be the unsung heroes of the kitchen, as few guests ever see them. "People may go out for



lunch or dinner, but not breakfast, so I always made sure that the first meal of the day was presented immaculately," added Val. Now enjoying having more energy in the mornings and free time for gardening in the warmer weather, her 7.30am starts may have concluded at work, but not at home. Terry, her four children and nine

grandchildren all love a full English, whilst Val's favourite breakfast is poached eggs on toast.

Ruby delight



Pat and Barry Cooper celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary.

Guests who discover The Cloud Hotel often return. Pat and Barry Cooper are one of its longest-standing regulars. The couple, from Wellesbourne, Warwickshire, have been visiting for 27 years and held their ruby wedding celebration there last September. "We used to holiday on the Isle of Wight, but stopped at the hotel as we drive through the New Forest to the ferry at Lymington one year. It was full, unfortunately, but we promised we'd come back," explained Pat.

They kept that promise, and met Helen, one of owner Avril's Owton's three daughters, when she was merely a few weeks old. During the 27 years, the couple, who are now retired, have made many friends locally. For their 40th wedding anniversary long weekend they, along with friends and relatives, virtually took over the hotel, with the highlight being a private dinner for 28 in the Garden Room. So why do they keep coming back? "It's everything about the Cloud: you relax as soon as you arrive, the staff are great and we love walking and seeing the wild animals, and everything which is unique to the New Forest. It's so vast we don't feel crowded," said Pat.

Charisma is catching

Members of the Wessex Women's Network (WWN) learned how to make the most of their charm with a session entitled 'Charisma Coaching' at the most recent meeting, held at The Cloud Hotel. Annie Slowgrove, managing director of Chameleon Coaching, presented a 45-minute workshop on the language of influence and charisma, and told members how to enter a room with the 'wow factor' and then leave a lasting confident impression, as well as covering a range of everyday situations.

Former Tiller Girl Avril Owton founded the WWN in 2002 for women in the New Forest area to get together, share ideas, network and have fun. "I may know about being on the stage, but speaking in front of a vast audience can be daunting, so we all found Annie's hints fascinating," Avril said.



Avril Owton

The customer is always right!

Avril Owton has been busy working on her first book, 'Delighting Your Customers on a Shoestring'.

Publisher A&C Black commissioned her to write a business guide on all aspects of customer service across different industries, based upon her success in turning a failing hotel into an award-winning one and subsequent high profile as an international speaker. Avril frequently uses her own business turnaround as an example of what can be achieved when she addresses audiences.

"It's quite a hard discipline to sit down and write something in the region of 40,000 words, when you are neither a writer nor a fast typist," said Avril, "but I'm really pleased to have completed it and look forward to seeing it in print."

Hampshire Food Festival 2007

The Cloud Hotel will once again be supporting this thriving celebration of Hampshire food and drink with a traditional cream tea on July 1.

The Festival, organised by county food group Hampshire Fare, runs from June 23 to July 8; it's a fortnight stuffed full of special events celebrating all that is good about local food and drink. The Cloud is an ideal base from which to explore and taste the best that Hampshire can offer and its cream tea will feature sumptuous scones by Linzi's of Lymington. If you are keen to find out more about Food Festival events, keep an eye on www.hampshirefare.co.uk. For more details on the Cloud cream tea, to book, or enquire about other events under consideration, call the hotel on 01590 622165.

Madame Chairman

The Cloud Hotel's proprietor Avril Owton has been appointed branch chairman for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Institute of Directors for the coming year. One of the IoD's largest branches, with around 2,000 members, it aims to support corporate development and to be the voice of business leaders in the area. The branch, which has offices within The Rose Bowl, home of Hampshire County Cricket Club, organised a highly successful Mentor Magic event for local entrepreneurs last year, based upon a constructive Dragons' Den format. Avril is looking forward to seeing how this year's contestants shape up as the heats take place. Mentor Magic was the brainchild of previous local chairman Colin Potter. "It's going to be a very exciting year for the IOD and Mentor Magic is inspirational for all involved," said Avril.