

# **New inn emphasizes the eco-friendly**

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**By Lisa McCormack**

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PHOTO BY GLENN CALLAHAN.

Sheila Tymon is the innkeeper at Thistledown Inn in Morrisville, a state-certified “green hotel.”

Guests at the Thistledown Inn in Morrisville enjoy amenities typical of Vermont bed-and-breakfasts: comfortable beds, cozy sitting areas and a hearty breakfast. But innkeeper Sheila Tymon offers something more: environmentally friendly accommodations that, she hopes, will inspire guests to practice resource conservation when they return home.

She calls it “ecological elegance.”

Tymon, who has taught environmental science at Peoples Academy in Morrisville since 1990, opened the inn earlier this year. It’s at 201 Park St., in the Horace Henry Powers House, which was built in the early 1880s. It retains much of its historic charm, with original wide-plank floors, pocket doors, molding and an expansive front porch.

Tymon bought the property in 1995 and has spent most of the past decade slowly renovating it.

The state has certified Thistledown Inn as a “green hotel” because it meets environmental conservation standards set by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

Tymon constantly looks for ways to reduce her impact on the environment. She has reduced by two-thirds the amount of waste the inn produces, through recycling and composting. She has reduced the pollution it releases into the environment by switching to non-toxic cleaning products.

And, she has reduced energy use by converting to compact fluorescent light bulbs and buying more energy-efficient appliances.

Guests can help by agreeing to reuse their towels, but Tymon tries not to be too pushy about her passion for conservation.

“One of the things that’s important for me to impart is that you don’t have to compromise your lifestyle,” Tymon said. “You just have to make better choices.” Some guests are drawn to the inn because of its environmental policies, while others are drawn to its affordable room rates. A one-night stay, including breakfasts, costs \$75.

## **Fulfilling a dream**

While she was earning a master’s degree in environmental science in the early 1980s, Tymon was introduced to an idea called “the whole life factor” by one of her favorite professors.

“It’s when you look at a factor and determine how it reflects labor and energy and

what its environmental consequences are,” Tymon said. “It was a new idea at the time and I went with it.”

Though Tymon devoted her career to teaching environmental science, she tossed around the idea of building a sustainable business, and once even wrote down a detailed vision of becoming an innkeeper.

Last year, when her oldest son went off to college and her mother moved into a carriage house on her property, Tymon decided the time was right to combine her love of environmental science with her dream of being an innkeeper.

Now, she says, “there’s no difference between what I do as a teacher, parent or innkeeper,” Tymon said. “When you live your values, you’re happy.”

### **Looking local**

Tymon buys local products whenever she can to support Vermonters and reduce the inn’s carbon footprint.

Her goal is to serve breakfasts with produce, meat and dairy products that come from within 100 miles of the inn.

She serves Green Mountain Coffee Roasters coffee, Vermont Liberty teas and Cold Hollow cider. Her sweet and savory hot breakfasts are made from organic farm-fresh eggs, milk, cheese and produce, and locally made spiced lamb sausage, bread and maple syrup.

She produces her own honey in hives behind the inn, and gives lessons in beekeeping to her guests and new beekeepers.

“Bringing locally grown food to the table preserves Vermont’s agricultural landscape while nourishing personal and planetary health,” Tymon said. Her desire to support local businesses is also evident in her guest rooms, which feature furniture from Vermont Precision Woodworks, a handcrafted furniture factory in Morrisville that uses Vermont-grown hardwoods.

### **Measuring a footprint**

Her career as a science teacher has made Tymon obsessive about measuring the impact of her environmental initiatives.

For example, she doesn’t just compost the inn’s food scraps; she calculates exactly how much she composts and what impact that has on the environment.

“Environmental science is rooted in deep research,” Tymon said. “It’s credible. My students are all about doing field studies and quantifying their labs.”

She touts the inn’s green initiatives on “ecofact cards” she places around the inn. She estimates that the inn composts an average of 6 pounds of food a day, diverting about a ton of food from the solid-waste stream each year. That prevents 16 pounds of carbon dioxide from going into the atmosphere, based on how much gasoline would be needed to haul the waste to the dump.

By replacing the inn’s 30 light bulbs, she estimates she will save 14,100 kilowatts of electricity over the life of the bulbs, putting less stress on the local power grid.

**Environmental impacts aside, Tymon finds the personal aspect of being an innkeeper enjoyable, too.**

**“When I have more than one couple staying here, the conversations go on and on,” Tymon said. “It’s like entertaining and having a little party every day.” The business seems to suit the grand old house.**

**“I think the spirit of the house is happy when people are here,” Tymon said. “You just have to make better choices.”**

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**“I’ve had the world’s best line dancer, a forensic scientist police officer — people from all walks of life,” Tymon said. “It’s a joy.”**