

Simply the best

Sally Alden

Imagine having your business or passion described as 'Exceptional in every way,' by a team of experts. Well, that's how our very own Willow Tree Inn was described by The Sydney Morning Herald Pub Food Guide 2014 reviewers. Last week the Inn was also awarded the Best Country Pub in NSW and received the acclaimed three schooners accolade.

Owners Charles and Cheryl Hanna, who also run their Angus beef enterprise Colly Creek located on the outskirts of Willow Tree, were thrilled by the win and the award.

"Winning awards is always a great feeling, but to win the SMH Good Pub Food Guide award for "Best Country Pub" in NSW, after only three years as owners of The Willow Tree Inn, is unbelievable. Together with the highest level Three Schooner award, the centenary celebrations of the pub and my 70th birthday, it has been an exciting week for me, personally," an enthusiastic Charles told the Quirindi Advocate.

Charles is quick to acknowledge the awards would not have been achieved without the support and day-to-day effort put in by Manager Tim Muschamp, Head Chef Damion Moyses and the entire team at the Willow Tree Inn.

"This is truly well-deserved recognition of the great work from our four chefs, plus kitchen staff headed by Damion Moyses, and all of our bar and wait staff, who offer excellent service under

the guidance of our manager, Tim Muschamp, and I know that our win is exciting for them also," he said.

For the last two years, the Willow Tree Inn has been awarded the Two Schooner rating; this year out of 500 pubs in NSW only 15 received Three Schooners, the Inn being one of them.

"This year, we concentrated on lifting our wait staff and bar staff service to a new level with in-house training and we were rewarded with the Three Schooner Award. In every business, you are only as good as the staff with whom you work every day and, I believe, we have a great team."

The Hanna's are a busy team, with their main business, Hannapak at North Richmond, manufacturing cardboard packaging for Australia's leading companies in the food, beverage and pharmaceutical industries as well as the Inn and Colly Creek.

"Our focus has always been on quality and service. We strive for, and consistently achieve, quality and service levels in the 98%-100% range on each and every order. Our focus on quality and service levels should be no different at the Willow Tree Inn."

Charles says a discussion four years ago at the Blackville Art Show with local farmers inspired him to purchase the Inn.

"They said someone should buy the pub at Willow Tree, do it up, and they would support



The Hon. George Souris MP, NSW Minister for Tourism, Hospitality, Racing and the Arts, and Charles Hanna, owner/operator of the Willow Tree Inn at The Sydney Morning Herald Pub Food Guide 2014 awards ceremony in Sydney last week. "I congratulate the Willow Tree Inn for winning the title of Best Country Pub in NSW in the Sydney Morning Herald Awards. It is not only well-deserved, but a source of pride for the community, it has become a destination for both travellers and nearby residents and is putting Willow Tree on the map," said Mr Souris.

Picture by Alexander Mayes.

it. That was probably the beginning of my foray into the hospitality industry and I am absolutely delighted that the local community have been so supportive since we opened the renovated and expanded Willow Tree Inn three years ago."

From day one Cheryl and Charles have designed and decorated all areas of the Inn, including the bars, restaurants, accommodation and outdoor areas to be not only family-friendly but

also feel like a home away from home.

"Every weekend we have children playing on the play equipment or just having a game of cricket or touch football on the top lawn under the Robinia trees while their parents are enjoying lunch on the back terrace. If children are happy, parents can relax."

According to Charles when you love what you do for a living, it's not work.

"I still get a buzz every morning just

thinking about what needs to happen that day, in different parts of our business. I am also very fortunate to have a great team of over 200 staff at Hannapak with the day-to-day operations under the leadership of our son, Sam, who was recently appointed Managing Director.

"I now finally have more time to travel with family and friends and do the things I want to do in life, which of course includes overseeing the Inn and

our cattle property at Willow Tree."

While some may take the SMH award as a sign they've made it, Charles is still passionate to move forward.

"In business, you can never stand still - you either go forwards or you go backwards - I am all for going forward over the next three years. We would like to renovate the old kitchen, laundry and store room out behind the stag bar and put in a couple of casual dining booths."

The Hanna's also plan to update and make changes to the menu and wine lists every 12 weeks to keep customers coming back to try new offerings.

"Continual training of our local staff will be ongoing, as we love to see the results of employing young people from the surrounding area and watching their confidence grow as they gain skills in the hospitality sector," concluded an elated Charles.

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