

FLAGSTAFF REGION FEATURED BUSINESS

Presented by Flagstaff County and The Community Press



Big Willy’s Bar
at The Heisler Hotel
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Their advertising slogan is: “A little out of the way ... a lot out of the ordinary.”

Indeed, located in the historic Heisler Hotel in the remote and tiny village of Heisler (population of approximately 135 in the 2021 census), Big Willy’s Bar is off the beaten path.

But it’s certainly worth the trip.

In fact, the Flagstaff Region is fortunate to lay claim to such a gem.

Ask co-owner Kelly Williams, however, and she’ll tell you that they’re fortunate to be in Flagstaff.

“We love having our business in Flagstaff County because we have the most supportive, amazing people in this community – absolutely amazing people!” Kelly lauds. “They have busy lives, but they still find time to come and support us. And we have been grateful for the last eight years.”

It was more than a decade ago when Kelly and husband John first looked at the iconic brick building on Heisler’s main street with an eye towards purchasing it.

“My husband and I were looking for a gathering place in our community. It was something that we thought we would be able to add to the community,” she recalls.

At that point, there was no plan to open a business.

“And the minute people heard that we were looking at this building, the first thing they asked is: ‘When are you going to open the bar?’ And that had never occurred to us,” Kelly adds. “It was just going to be our home.”

Kelly and John soon warmed to the idea of transforming the old hotel into a sports-themed, family friendly pub.

“My husband got transferred down to the mine in Forestberg, and there was something that Kelly needed to do,” she notes. “And so, we thought this would be a good project. So, we spent three years getting and putting it back together, and we opened in August of 2015.”

Beyond the bar and pub-style restaurant, the landmark business also offers Chilly Willy’s ice cream shack via a takeout window, as well as two bed-and-breakfast rooms upstairs.

Kelly strives to treat every customer like they’re a guest in her own home, because, well, they actually are guests in her home.

“This is an extension of my home. I live upstairs, so I want them to feel at home,” she says. “If there’s something specific they’d like, if

something doesn’t work for them, if I can adjust something, I’ll gladly do that.”

So it comes as no surprise that everything in this homey restaurant is homemade – from their sauces and their gravies to their pizza dough, their burgers and their desserts.

“We don’t precook anything. Everything is made to order,” she adds.

“Part of what I like to do is cook what I like. So, I love any kind of ethnic food. So, I make Thai curry shrimp. I make Bombay chicken. I do anything that can bring something different to the community.”

Kelly and John also really enjoy craft beer.

“We absolutely love craft beer. And if we try it and we like it, we bring it in,” Kelly explains. “In doing some research, we realized that there’s almost 200 craft breweries in Alberta. We have 15 different breweries that we’re carrying currently and a total of probably over 50 different beers.”

Of course, Kelly and John can’t do it all themselves. The couple owes a debt of gratitude to their staff.

“We’re really fortunate with our staff. ... The people that we’ve had for the last eight years, they’re all gems, every single one of them,” she praises.

For more information, find Big Willy’s Bar at The Heisler Hotel on Facebook and Instagram, and be sure to watch the video on The Community Press website:
thecommunitypress.com