

*'Visitors are often at a disadvantage ... my job is to make my clients happy and their lives easier ... if they are happy, they'll call me back for more services'*

*— Amanda Abbott of Your Concierge in Halifax*

## Ritzy camping with the butler

### COTTAGE CONCIERGE

**Busy execs leave the details to the local help**

BY MEAGHAN CLARK

Time is money, and for those with precious time, getting the most out of downtime means not sweating the details. By enlisting a concierge service, the small stuff is taken care of which means more time to enjoy life.

Nowhere is leisure time more valuable than at the cottage (cabin, if you're from Western Canada). But if the thought of schlepping the groceries and weekend wear and gear into the car, boat and out again makes you glum, take solace knowing there are people willing to do that — for a price, of course.

Need to arrange for boating lessons and activities for guests? Want to have travel accommodations for out-of-town family members taken care of? These are just some of the more common requests put forth to local concierge companies across the country who are witnessing the transition of concierge from urban dwelling to vacation properties and beyond.

Cynthia Pickering began her business, Time Is Money, Executive Concierge, about two years ago. Ms. Pickering (whose background is as a credit analyst for

the oil and gas business in Alberta) realized there were few, if any, services available to executives who wanted to "make time for things that matter," as her business motto notes. Frequent requests for shopping, car servicing, pet care and the like now share the stage with more advanced, detailed requests.

Today, Ms. Pickering has seen her business grow tremendously in the booming western province. The many Calgarians who have bought vacation properties in the B.C. Interior and other outlying areas need assistance that goes beyond the norm. "Many clients have cabins in more remote areas, which means greater transportation needs, for example," says Ms. Pickering, who often finds herself booking private planes for clients and their guests. Gathering provisions isn't easy to do from miles away, so Ms. Pickering solicits local retailers and tradesmen to meet her clients' needs.

Using outside sources and sub-contracting with locals is something Amanda Abbott of Your Concierge does often. The Halifax native does a brisk business with locals who need her to gift-wrap presents, shop for family members and arrange for key appointments. However, it is her out-of-town and international clients who lack relationships with tradesmen and rely not only on her time-management skills, but on her Rolodex as well.

"Visitors are often at a disadvantage," says the entrepreneur who puts together short- and long-term solutions for



DAN ABRIEL

Your Concierge can provide services for cleaning, shopping, gift-wrapping, pet care or household labour.

both occasional and regular visitors. Recently, Ms. Abbott was faced with the task of pre-screening a series of properties for an American couple looking to buy a waterfront prop-

erty. Ms. Abbott teamed up with a local realtor, scouted homes and laid out a plan that allowed the potential home owners to view the list during their three-day trip. "My job is to make

my clients happy and their lives easier," she says.

"Providing clients with freedom to enjoy what they've always enjoyed" is the mantra for Toronto-based concierge Brian

Cartwright of Turn Key Concierge, a company that provides personal care, chauffeuring services and livery, and relocation and travel services for executive households. "We go where our clients go," says Mr. Cartwright who has always provided services at vacation properties. He has been in business for several years, but has seen his out-of-town business grow dramatically in the past two years.

Mr. Cartwright, from a long line of cottagers in Ontario, firmly believes in providing every amenity to make the cottage experience work for everyone, including elderly family members. Acting as a liaison with nursing agencies and providing non-medical care for clients at the cottage is common for Turn Key. Ensuring his clients are able to go boating (Mr. Cartwright is a licensed boat captain) for instance, is what makes his job pleasurable.

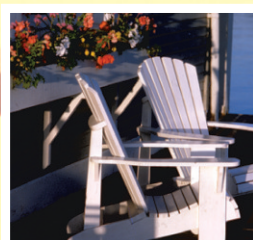
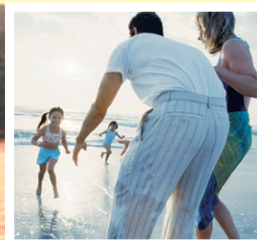
All of these concierges stress the importance of using local tradesmen and businesses for ethical reasons. Len Chilton of Muskoka Professional Handyman Services, understands this first hand. Having lived in cottage country his entire life, Mr. Chilton has watched the cottage industry grow tremendously and embarked on a second career as a handyman to out-of-town properties. Muskoka Professional Handyman Services has been in business only two months, but has already tripled its staff, vehicles and the number of clients. "I've been more successful than I ever imagined," says the former fire investigator.

Taking care of smaller jobs that larger contractors don't have time for — painting interiors and repairing screens — are tasks vacationers now turn over to Mr. Chilton. With many clients looking to use their properties year-round, handymen are kept busy upgrading get-away properties.

National Post

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