



## **Meet Debbie Meritsky and Marc Rotman, owners of Black Sheep Inn & Spa and F.L.A.V.O.R. Studio...**

### **1. Describe Your Business:**

Open all year long, the Black Sheep Inn and Spa is an adult retreat that is centrally located to many award-winning wineries, craft breweries, local cheese producers and a tremendous selection of cultural and outdoor activities. It is located just outside of Hammondsport, NY, where it is an easy walk to town and Keuka Lake. Black Sheep Inn has five guest rooms. There are also packages available that include activities with your stay, including Romantic Finger Lakes Retreat, Girlfriend Getaway, and Ultimate Finger Lakes Museum Pass packages. On the property you will also find F.L.A.V.O.R. Studio and Gallery. Marc and Debbie utilize recycled and repurposed items in the art they make and display in their converted barn. They also offer classes in this space. "We are really focused on the guest experience - offering the best of what the region has to offer, while still being relaxing," Marc said.

### **2. Tell us your story:**

Debbie and Marc opened Black Sheep Inn and Spa in 2007, after purchasing the property five years prior. At the time, the house had been divided into a four-family rental. "When we came, we saw the potential in the house to turn it into our bed and breakfast," Debbie said. Debbie's background is as a classically trained French chef, and Marc has a background in design. "Our story is really that of two people doing well in their respective careers but needing to move to the next level somewhere else," Marc explained. Their backgrounds came in handy when it came time to transition to running Black Sheep Inn. Marc's design experience helped significantly when it came time to do the renovations and interior design in the house. Debbie's cooking background has helped the inn become well known for its breakfasts. The inn was originally focused on food and design but has since morphed into much more. Debbie and Marc added the spa about six years ago to fulfill the needs and desires of their guests. The spa is now also open to the public. The inn was also the catalyst for starting Arts in Bloom, the annual Steuben County Arts Trail event. Arts in Bloom encouraged them to open F.L.A.V.O.R. studio and gallery, which is going into its sixth year. "Once we got here and got established, we really haven't looked back," Marc said.

### **3. What has helped you succeed and gain experience?**

"We're really persistent," Debbie stated. "We don't take 'no' for an answer. Our name, Black Sheep, really sets us apart from everyone else, for better or for worse." Debbie added that because they are focused on the guest experience and don't limit themselves to showing guests only the high tourism points of the area. "There are so many hidden things that happen here, whether that be a special drive, a destination for ice cream, or something else hands-on oriented. We really like to spread the wealth around," she explained. "And we're still gaining experience," Marc added. "The business itself, the industry, has changed so remarkably in the last ten years with the changes online with how people find accommodations and travel destinations."

### **4. What inspires you?**

"People that say 'yes!'" Debbie stated, saying that they are really inspired by good partnerships. "And getting guest responses. When people come here a lot of them book packages, and they are doing that with a specific intent in mind. It makes us really happy, because they are geared in a different way that someone who is just coming for an overnight. They are excited and ready to have fun, and we make it very easy for them. All they have to do is show up."

"We are also inspired by the natural beauty around us," Marc added. "We're inspired by the art that is taking place around us, inclusive of our own studio. It's a creative effort - not just the art, not just the food, but the inn itself and the region. There's so much going on that has a creative bent to it that if you're paying attention there is inspiration everywhere."

### **5. What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?**

Debbie says that one thing that keeps her up at night is the lack of collaborative efforts in the region, and that the region as a whole doesn't have a way to market itself consistently. "When it comes to tourists, I believe that we are losing dollars every single day because we aren't working better together as a region," she explained. "People get confused by the enormity of the region, and the amount of product," Marc elaborated. "They can't figure it out, so they decide to go somewhere else."

### **6. What is your favorite local activity?**

"Inside my inn, it's really a toss-up between working in my studio and cooking," Debbie said. "Going back to nature, it's the hiking that's available, the waterfalls that are accessible, the farms that we partner with," Marc said. "And the arts community."

### **7. Is there anything else we should know about you?**

Debbie and Marc like to know what is going on around them. "It is pretty rare that we say no to anything," Debbie said. "We will always say to give us the information, give us a minute, and we'll come up with something to do. "We're here to have fun!" Marc said. "We're not just here to provide fun, we're here to have fun ourselves. If we aren't having fun, our guests aren't having fun."