Roger Poulin ’63 / The Towne Motel, Skowhegan, ME

By Elizabeth Walker

After many years of working and living in developing countries around the world Roger Poulin ’63, then an economist with the U.S. Agency for International Development, was ready for a career change and a small-town lifestyle for his family. In 1978, Poulin decided to relocate his work and home life to Madison Avenue, which, at first glance, hardly seems like the right address for a quiet life. But the Poulin family’s globe-trotting lifestyle experienced a decided downshift when relocated to Madison Avenue in Skowhegan, ME, a town that has grown to about 9,000 residents over the years.

Life was simpler when Roger Poulin and his late wife, Sally, bought The Towne Motel, originally a 20-room, single-storey motor court of yore, now painted white with neat yellow trim and a second storey added. The motel, which is around the corner from Skowhegan’s downtown, had an attached house where the family, including five children, took up residence. Back then, travelers were looking for “four walls, a bed, and a shower,” according to Poulin. Today, high-speed Internet access, voicemail and cable TV are the most basic expectations of most guests.

Owning a motel in central Maine is not the way to make a living for a family of seven, said Poulin, who is now married to Deborah. To supplement his annual income he works from his home base in Maine, as an international economic consultant for several months a year.

The values Poulin took away from Assumption affected his whole life, he said. “Because of what I learned at Assumption, I work only in developing countries. I grew up in Maine in a French-Canadian family. My parents sent me to Assumption for its French-Canadian tradition. Assumption was demanding. The core curriculum forced a rigor in our thinking. It made graduate school at American University easy.”

“We have quite a bit of a season—from May to October,” Poulin said. “It’s a fairly long season for Maine. “There’s a fairground nearby and horse shows all summer long.”

The Towne Motel’s season also is extended because there is so much to do in and around Skowhegan, and many guests return year after year. In addition to whitewater rafting on the Kennebec River, which runs through downtown, this central Maine community boasts proximity to ski areas, water- and trail-based recreational activities, as well as the annual Skowhegan State Fair, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the New Balance Shoe factory and outlet, and one of the nation’s last drive-in movie theaters still in operation.

“With online reviews proclaiming, “A perfect ‘10.’ We stayed at The Towne Motel while visiting family in Skowhegan. It was a clean, warm and friendly place to stay...,” it’s no wonder that the Poulin family motel enjoys a high percentage of return business.

Owning a motel turned out to be the way I expected it to be,” he said. “We want our guests to be happy with their rooms; happy with the people they meet. We want them to feel that the Towne Motel is one of the nicest places they stayed on their whole trip. My father was in a different business, but I run my business with the same values my father ran his.”