

## AN ORGANIC B&B

In Millstone, very fresh food and a place to stay

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Neither Roz Ressler nor Michael Diehl expected they'd be spending what might seem like their retirement years running a farm.

"My mother was quite surprised," Ressler remembered with a chuckle, as she walked about the grounds of the 8 1/4-acre Earth Friendly Organic Farm and Bed & Breakfast in Millstone Township.

But there they were, strolling the grounds one cold, damp morning earlier this week, examining the small, greenish buds on the blueberry bushes as a flock of chickens followed attentively.

"There's fewer and fewer places for people to go and see a farm," said Diehl. "People come here and they see chickens and they pick blueberries and they pick blackberries. They come here and they say, "Wow!" "

Ressler, 65, and Diehl, 78, come to the farm and B&B business from different backgrounds. Ressler spent the past 10 years teaching tai chi and yoga, and Diehl owns the Freehold Music Center in Freehold Township.

Ressler bought the farm in 2004. The previous owner, Jim Schmitt, had been running it as a bed-and-breakfast since 1995.

"We fell in love with the house right away," Ressler recalled.

The couple were both looking for something new to do with their lives, and so they decided to buy the three-bedroom place and spruce it up.

They wouldn't say how much money they've invested in the property, but they've definitely put in a lot of hard work. In the past year they've planted 700 blueberry bushes, doubling the previous amount, and about 250 raspberry bushes. Newly planted fruit trees are in the ground, and they installed an irrigation system from a pond on the property to keep the plants from getting thirsty.

In addition, they just purchased 45 chicks to add to the full-grown hens and roosters they have. The chicks for now are housed in a large cardboard box with heat lamps, but when they get old enough, they'll be free to roam the property as their older companions do already.

It's all part of Ressler's and Diehl's efforts to make the place "earth friendly," as the name proclaims. Customers can enjoy eggs for breakfast that were laid that morning, and during the growing season, fresh berries and other fruits are staples. Many people come just to take part in the berry-picking, they said.

### Fresh blueberries

"You feel very safe eating everything," said Elaine Taylor, a frequent customer of Earth Friendly and owner of the Shangri La Farm in Howell. She likes to buy blueberries at Earth Friendly and flash freeze them so she can savor them all winter long.

There's no comparison with blueberries shipped to supermarkets out of season from overseas, she said. "You can taste the difference."

"Most inns reflect their owners," said Tom Volker, former president of the Preferred Inns of New Jersey, a trade group. He and his wife, Rosemary, own the Inn at the Shore in Belmar.

By reflecting their interests, inns can distinguish themselves in the eyes of customers, Volker said.



(STAFF PHOTO: DAVE MAY)

The Earth Friendly Organic Farm and Bed & Breakfast is owned by Michael Diehl and Roz Ressler.

### AT A GLANCE

17 Olde Noah Hunt Road, Millstone Township

House was built in 1984, converted into a bed and breakfast in 1995. Purchased by Roz Ressler in 2004.

Three rooms are available for overnight stays, and customers can pick a variety of fruits growing on the farm as well as get freshly laid eggs.

Among the fruits grown there are blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, Granny Smith apples and persimmons. A variety of vegetables, such as asparagus, lettuce and spinach, are grown there, too.

Rates are \$85 to \$95 per night, including a full breakfast.

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"For example, the Chimney Hill Inn in Lambertville has alpacas because the owners like alpacas. And there's Summer Nites in North Wildwood, which has a '50s and '60s theme, with things like an Elvis room and a Marilyn Monroe room and a diner with jukeboxes."

Ressner and Diehl are working to do the same by promoting their environmental interests. Diehl has been taking a master gardening class through the Rutgers University Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County to bone up on his plant-raising knowledge.

Some customers are not drawn to the B&B by the environmental message. Some are just looking for a comfortable place to stay. Diehl recalled the night last year four young men from Brooklyn called, saying they were bushed after a day spent having fun at nearby Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, and wondering if any rooms were available. They were, and the four spent the night before heading back to New York.

### **Lack of hotels**

"There's really a dearth of hotels around here," Ressner said.

In the future, Ressner plans to offer yoga and tai chi lessons, and Diehl will continue to improve the grounds. They expect to be making a profit within the next two years, Diehl said.

"We get a lot of satisfaction out of getting things done," Diehl said.

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