

Hospitality

A Piece of Americana



Mission Point's main lodge on Mackinac Island

An Interview with

Liz Ware, Co-Owner, Mission Point, Mackinac Island

EDITORS' NOTE After her graduation from Indiana University in 1989 and a brief stint at the Department of Economic Development for the City of Indianapolis, Liz Ware joined her mother's real estate team at Re/Max specializing in corporate relocation and becoming a top producer. Ware relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1992 and joined the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (now Destination Marketing Association International). In 1996, she went to work for the Greater



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Washington Society of Association Executives (GWSAE) and became its Chief Rainmaker. GWSAE and the American Society of Association Executives merged and Ware became its Chief Rainmaker and Chief Strategist for organizations' new revenue development. She was also publisher of its magazines. Ware became the Senior Vice President of Client Services at IEG, LLC in 2008. She was the Chief Architect for their affinity program and led the internal and external sales teams. In 2010, she left IEG and became an active volunteer with the Chicago Yacht Club. She also became the Editor of Blinker, Chairman of the Special Events Committee, and served on both the sponsorship and Race to Mackinac Committees.

PROPERTY BRIEF On 18 acres of lakefront property where Lake Huron meets Lake Michigan lies the 239-room Mission Point (missionpoint.com). Ideal for families, honeymooners, friends, and groups, the Great Lakes icon embraces the best of the destination's past while incorporating today's twists on the classics. Four restaurants boast some of the best food on the island, including tasty takes on the region's white fish as well as wine, beer, and spirit selections sourced from nearby. In the morning, the sweeping lawn that is the centerpiece of the property hosts picnickers feasting on local favorites as part of the resort's Sun-Up Sessions, while later in the day it may be dotted with guests lounging in crisp white Adirondack chairs or by a couple celebrating their nuptials with loved ones another day. Mission Point offers activities such as a waterfront 18-hole putting course, an observation tower and museum, a movie theater, the Mackinac art and history museum, and a tennis court. Additionally, the property offers over 38,000 square feet of flexible state-of-the-art function space for meetings and events.

When your family made the purchase, what excited you about it and made you feel you could add value to this iconic property?

Mackinac Island is really a magical destination in and of itself. It's a piece of Americana. There are no cars, but we have horses and wagons and bicycles.

I got involved with Mackinac Island through the Chicago Yacht Club's Race to Mackinac. I was going up there every summer and I found one property in particular on

the northeast side of the Island which was an old Adirondack-style lodge, overlooking Lake Huron with state park all around it.

My mom and I bought the property. From there, the owner of Mission Point asked if we would be interested in it since they knew what we were doing at the first property.

My dad was excited to take on Mission Point. The island doesn't have any chain hotels on it – they're all family-owned, so this kept that tradition. It also gave me an opportunity to work with my parents, which is really special.

How can you expand the understanding about what this type of destination provides?

Mackinac Island is currently a seasonal resort area. Our market is primarily the Midwest, but we're seeing trends of a lot of international visitors. We're also seeing interest from Texas and California, so it makes sense for the New York market as well.

What have been your priorities in transforming the property?

When we purchased the property, it needed some significant updates. It was probably a mid-scale property and we were looking to make it an upper-upscale property.

We have since outlined all the infrastructure that needs to be renovated as well as the soft goods and other elements to make it pretty. We have updated all the mechanical HVAC systems, we've put new kitchens in – now we're getting to the fun part where we're putting in a new spa and shopping this year. We have also redone all of the public spaces so we truly reflect a lakeside destination.

How broad are the accommodation offerings and is there a common feel throughout?

We have several different kinds of accommodations. We have our luxury suites and regular guest rooms, but we also have 53 family suites, which are great because there is one common area and two bedrooms, so parents can let their kids go to sleep and they can stay awake without waking the children.

How are you putting in the focus on art and culture?

There are many artists on Mackinac Island and we really want to capture that creativity so we have a lot of local artists featured throughout the hotel. We have three large paintings of the view from Mission Point that were done by a local artist, Lily Porter.

Would you talk about the wellness focus?

This year, we're going to be offering bike tours throughout the island. The island is eight miles around and 80 percent of it is state park so there are a lot of trails. People have been coming to Mackinac Island for more than 100 years because the air quality is so good.

Mission Point is on the east side of the island where the sun comes up, and the sunrises are spectacular. We offer a sun-up session where we go up the east side to watch the sunrise, and we offer yoga on the lawn.

Our cuisine is also all locally sourced and designed to support our wellness focus.

Would you talk about that emphasis on food and beverage?

Everyone now is doing farm-to-table. What sets us apart is that we have Lake Michigan on one side and Lake Huron on the other, so our fish comes from St. Ignace, which is a Native American fishery. It's not that it comes from a different part of the lake but rather right next to us.

The food vendors in Michigan are all very conscious of locally sourced produce and we can get tons of fresh fruit from the Travers City area. We have such rich soil in northern Michigan that the vegetables are fantastic.

Has this process been what you expected when you took it on?

It has been better. A lot of work had to be done but we're growing this brand. It's great to see a lot of our guests come back and see what we've done, but to be able to give back to Mackinac Island and the State of Michigan is something we're really proud of. ●