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COME STAY WITH US – PELICAN MOTEL HAS NEW OWNERS

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By Heather Rule

Joe Clauson grew up on a farm in the Pelican Rapids area, where he said a work ethic was built into him. A pastor for 20 years, he met his wife, Iliana, on a mission trip to Mexico. They've been married for 24 years and spent the past six years living in Texas.

But Joe said he got the feeling that it was time to return home, to Otter Tail County, to be closer to family and support the community. Having moved back to Pelican Rapids, Joe saw a need to support a local business that was failing, so he and his wife purchased the singlelevel Pelican Motel on Jan. 1, 2020 after it had fallen into foreclosure.

Joe got to work remodeling 15 traditional guest rooms, each with either a single queen bed or two double beds. In early June 2020, they opened up a studio apartment as an option for guests. The studio and a cabin each feature a queen bed with a secondary sleeper and cooking facilities. "We're a little bit of a flash from the past of the old motel," Joe said. "Drive up to your door. You have your own private space. There's not much common area. We're a little retro."

With the motel in a bit of disrepair, Joe pushed up his sleeves and did nearly all of the remodeling work himself. Sixty to seventy percent of the flooring, all the beds, linens and mattresses were replaced. Plus, everything was repainted, Joe said of the motel, located at 900 N. Broadway. His wife, Iliana, has a full-time job in addition to her work managing the motel.

One big draw of staying at Pelican Motel is that it's, of course, located in the middle of the lakes area with plenty of fishing, kayaking and hiking among the local recreational activities for visitors.

Business slowed because of COVID-19, but the Clausons enjoy their new venture as motel owners. Joe likes the hospitality part of the job and connecting with people, whether it's chatting with guests or helping them find things they need.

Several families that stayed at the motel during the pandemic were visiting ill family or friends in the area. Joe was there to help encourage the guests through those times, when it's "not a reason that you want to travel but sometimes you need to," he said. The personal aspect to hospitality is a big deal for him, Joe said. "So I think for me, it's touched a personal note on some of that," Joe said. "The actual, personal side of hospitality."