

From politics and policy to wellness and goats

By Mahala Gainer

FOR 17 years, Nuriootpa resident Elizabeth Hoyt was a high-level government employee, working as an adviser to Prime Ministers Tony Abbott, Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd, and Malcolm Turnbull.

Now the proud owner of the oldest motel in the Barossa Valley, Barossa Palms Motel, Ms Hoyt traded her influential role consulting the leaders of the country to pursue a life of hospitality, wellness and goats.

"I'm trying to build a legacy for my children now... that's the difference. Before I had an office job," she said.

Nestled in Nuriootpa, behind towering palm trees, sits a white and sage green wellness retreat with history dating back to the 1960s.

Ms Hoyt took over the accommodation, formerly known as Barossa Gateway Motel, in 2024, equipped with a big dream.

"My goal is to become Australia's leading accessible wellness destination," she said.

Owning a motel had never been on her bingo card.

But in 2021, Ms Hoyt pitched an idea to her US-born husband, Daniel Hoyt.

"I was like, 'Babe, my cup's not full!'" she said.

"I think we quit our jobs."

The couple had been living in the US with their two children, Grayson, now 10, and Evelyn, now 7, since 2019.

Her dad owned the Barossa Gateway Motel at the time and had previously asked her if she wanted to take over, but up until then, the answer had always been no.

"I was like, 'no, no way, we're in America, we've got our government jobs, like my super's great, I'm happy,'" she said.

But after a long career in politics and policy, with roles in the Australian Government, Northern Territory Government, World Health Organization, and Idaho Government, working through the COVID-19 pandemic left her burnt out and ready for a change.

At the time, she was managing 28 staff and 38 Zoom meetings in a 40-hour work week for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on anti-tobacco.

So both Ms Hoyt and Mr Hoyt, who also worked for the government, took the leap,



The Barossa Palms owner Elizabeth Hoyt is shooting for the stars, hoping to become Australia's top accessible wellness destination. (Photo: Mahala Gainer 576090_08)

quitting their jobs.

"There's kind of a tipping point where you become financially independent [enough] where you can jump and go, 'okay, I'm ready to be an entrepreneur business owner now,'" she said.

"So we said let's buy a motel and do that instead."

For their last two years living in the US, the family road-tripped across America, finding inspiration from motels and operating Airbnbs from Idaho to Tennessee.

When they finally made it back to Australia in 2024, they were no strangers to hospitality and renovations. The couple already had 11 renovation projects under their belt.

But the motel was different. Gathering all the knowledge, skills, and ideas from her former career, five university degrees and life experience, she began creating a place that put

her passion, wellness, first.

"I've taken a tired-old building and I'm breathing new life into it, and I hope that's what we can do for our guests," she said.

Equipped with amenities including a cold plunge, a gym featuring morning affirmations, a massage room with zero-gravity chairs, a secret underground bar and oversized poolside cabanas, Ms. Hoyt wants guests to leave feeling refreshed and rejuvenated.

"Some of my guests are tired and a little bit battered... and they feel a little bit better when they leave... I love that," she said.

But the standout feature, the thing people travel from all over the country just to experience, is the miniature herd of goats: Ginger, Bill, Sage, Basil and Storm.

What began as pets for Grayson and Evelyn quickly became the stars of the motel, with guests from interstate citing the goats as the

reason they came to stay.

"The goats [are] totally winning the hearts and souls of everybody," she said.

While most families choose a dog or a cat, Ms Hoyt grew up on a 7000-acre farm outside the rural South Australian town of Karoonda, where she was surrounded by hundreds of goats and thousands of sheep.

Guests can interact with the goats in their paddock, with plans under way to expand the offering to include formal yoga retreats as part of their broader wellness developments.

The goat wellness program is self-guided, allowing guests to spend time alongside their cute new friends for free at their leisure.

"Some of our guests will... spend all day with the goats. They come out and they will paint pictures [or] just read books," she said.

From the Press for Champagne button she saw when traveling the US to the hospitality-first mindset, life in North America is etched into the details of Barossa Palms Motel.

Drawing on the tipping culture that makes US hospitality workers go the extra mile, after more than a year of operating, the motel has maintained a 5-star rating on Google.

While life a decade ago compared to now may look like day and night, Ms. Hoyt said her experience across her previous career has been a huge asset to this new venture.

"As a policy analyst, you look at a problem, you look at the barriers, you look at the opportunities, and you recommend solutions to get to where you need to go," she said.

Looking to the future, Ms Hoyt has a 10-year plan mapped out to make the motel Australia's "leading accessible wellness" destination.

Construction is under way on a serenity room, designed as a space that can host corporate events, including yoga retreats, sound meditations, and artisan workshops.

And just down the road, Mr. Hoyt's dream motel is in the works, with plans to one day host music nights and food trucks, aligning with his personal passions.

"We're building a community here," Ms Hoyt said.

"I consider myself to be the current custodian of a very special property, and I hope that I'm able to breathe new life into it."



The newly launched goat wellness program is a guest favourite. (576090_09)



Elizabeth Hoyt took over the motel from her dad, keeping some historical highlights while giving it a makeover. (576090_18)



The Bunyip journalist Mahala Gainer with one of the pygmy goats. (576090_07)



Guests of the motel will sometimes paint or sketch pictures of the goats. (576090_15)



Photos from Ms Hoyt's previous life. (570690_02)