

COMMUNITY

WHAT THING YOU DO

Bordello museum a 'fun retirement project'

By M.D. Kincaid
Correspondent

Michelle Mayfield proves the theory that if you enjoy your work, it will keep you young. Looking great for 68, she enjoys the chance to meet people from around the world when they stop by to tour her intriguing Oasis Bordello Museum in Wallace.

Born and raised in the Wallace area, Mayfield witnessed firsthand the unique lifestyle of the mining town tucked between the mountains of the Coeur d'Alene National Forest.

Gambling and prostitution went unabated until an FBI investigation brought local laws in line with the rest of the country. The Oasis, which began in 1895 as a hotel and saloon, saw its last day of serving the public in January 1988, when the girls left in haste – to avoid a pending federal law enforcement raid.

The house is preserved just as it was left, except mannequins replace the working girls. Mayfield researched the bordello's colorful history, even interviewing the madam and her employees, to keep it authentic.

After 31 years working for local doctors, Mayfield was looking for a fun retirement project when she and her husband, also recently retired, heard of the Oasis being for sale. Although far from her own stable family life, Mayfield had found her project and she has operated the former bordello as a museum for the last 13 years.

In her spare time, Mayfield plays golf and spends three months each winter in Arizona.

What is your job title? "Curator of the Oasis Bordello Museum in Wallace, Idaho."

How long have you been doing this? "13 years, the 23rd. of October."

How did you choose this line of work? "My husband, Jack, and I both retired from our jobs that we had for some 30 years. The opportunity came along to make one of Wallace's former brothels into a museum – sounded like fun and it has been great."

Are you paid: (a) well; (b) more than you are worth; (c) slave wages, (d) could be better? "Could be better."

What is the best thing about your job? "Being involved in tourism and the chance to meet people from all over. Learning about a profession that a lot of people said should be swept under the carpet. History is history, regardless of what we think."

What is the worst thing about your job? "A slow day."

Do you plan on doing this job (a) until retirement; (b) until something better comes along? "As long as I can."

Do you have any on-the-job funny stories? "People often ask me if men come in thinking it's the real thing. Yes, they do, especially during hunting season, usually from the South or Midwest. About four years ago, four men walked in the front door, looked around, kind of confused, and then went through the red door that leads to the museum. I walked over and told them they had to pay down here. Looking really confused, one of them turned and said, 'We have always paid the girls



Mike Kincaid/Handle Extra

Michelle Mayfield stands in the Oasis Bordello museum kitchen, with timers in the background.

upstairs in the past.' I just smiled and told them it was a museum. Four very red faces rushed out the door without turning back.

"Last summer, I asked a man if he would like to join the next tour. 'Lady I have been in every brothel from Montana to California.' As I started upstairs he handed me \$5 and said, 'What the heck, might as well.' Had about nine people on the

tour, everyone was having fun and this man never said a word until the end of the tour. He looked at me and said, 'Lady, that was the best five bucks I ever spent.' The rest of the folks agreed."

Any bad experiences? "None that I can think of."

If there was a movie made about you and your job, what actor should play you? "Diane Keaton, she has

been my favorite for years – love the movies she plays in. She is the most unlikely person to actually run the 'local brothel museum,' just as I am told I was."

■ Do you know someone with an unusual, interesting, or just a great job? E-mail M.D. Kincaid with your suggestions at spokesman@adelphia.net