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## **Experience Limerick's beauty in The Bedford**

### **Peter and Denise Brazil from The Bedford Townhouse & Café were discussing the business this morning at the Friday Breakfast Club in Limerick Workbench.**

Peter Brazil, who is the managing director The Limerick Travel Group, along with his wife Denise, a chartered accountant, opened the doors of The Bedford in Limerick a little over a year ago. The two were speaking this morning at the Friday Breakfast Club in Limerick Workbench.

The Bedford was born out of a vision to restore Bedford House to its original use – that of a townhouse residence and to provide Limerick with a new boutique property; one that has Limerick at the heart of its story. Here Denise discusses their business journey over the last year.

#### **How did The Bedford come about?**

There has been a gap in the Limerick market for a wider selection of boutique properties for a number of years. Thankfully Limerick has gone through a renaissance over the last number of years and has seen increased inbound commercial and tourism activity; both of which has created an increased demand for accommodation in the city centre. This provided the opportunity for the creation of The Bedford.

In terms of our USP – for us it's all about the guest experience. This is grounded in four pivotal themes – heritage, design, Limerick and wellness. Dating back to 1830, Bedford House was once two Georgian townhouses with a rich industrial heritage. Bringing this old and new world together was the starting point of our interior design journey and enabled us to restore the residence feel of the townhouse but also to provide all the luxury of a five star hotel experience.

Limerick is the lady of The Bedford and we have set ourselves with the goal of ensuring that every guest that stays with us knows that they are staying in Limerick property. We promote our great city through our room names and our Bedford Row Heritage Trail which is on display in our Parlour Room. Finally we want our guests to leave The Bedford feeling more rejuvenated than when they arrived. This is ensured through calming colour palettes, natural fabrics and our wellness breakfast in the café. This vision underlies our core values as a company and we share this with our entire team to ensure that there is an integrity and consistency in the delivery of this vision.

#### **How did you fund and start the business and what are your growth plans?**

The Bedford was very much a strategic decision and investment, and required the full redevelopment of Bedford House which was funded through both investment from the business

and through financing from Bank of Ireland.

As a new business our first year is focused on brand awareness and building our customer base. As part of these plans, we hosted our official opening back in February which was opened by City and County Mayor, James Collins. We were also delighted to be featured on RTE's At Your Service in April with The Brennan Brothers. We are committed in our first year in building a strong repeat business base and we focus on service excellence on every stage through the guest experience to help deliver this. We have a commitment to building a sustainable business and have taken strategic steps in this area already such as selecting compostable cups and takeaway packaging in our café and refillable spa products in our townhouse bathroom to avoid any single-use plastics. Finally we want to share our beautiful space with the city and are planning activities for Heritage Week in August to showcase our history.

### **What (or whom) has helped you most along the way?**

We have both had great guidance and support for both our parents and siblings which we could not do this without. When starting a new business you obviously look to your network of contacts and friends within the industry to learn from their wealth of experience. We have been so fortunate of the time and inputs that we've had from so many within our network. Finally our wonderful team in Limerick Travel and The Bedford – nothing happens without them and they are the life and soul of both businesses.

### **How do you stay ahead of your competitors?**

The focus for us is providing a truly unique guest experience when a guest stays at The Bedford – this is our biggest differentiator. Being a boutique property – our personality is everything, and guests expect something different when they stay with us. We like to think that we provide this through all the little touches throughout the Townhouse and this has been reinforced on the reviews that we have received to date. We do of course keep track of market trends and wider economic trends to ensure that we are staying ahead of the curve but you really need to focus on your own business and driving the vision. Once you are keeping your guest and employee at the heart of what you do then this will keep you on the right track.

### **What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome along the way?**

The biggest new challenge for any new business is opening! When you are developing a new business while trying to keep an existing business operational, that poses many challenges as you can imagine. We put a lot of time into our operational planning ahead of opening but this is an ongoing learning curve that keeps us all on our toes.

**If you were to do it all over again, what would you do differently?**

In a perfect world there are little things here and there you would change but overall there is not much we would do differently given our time back. This is testament to all the planning and project management throughout the project and ahead of opening. Yes of course we have made mistakes along the way; but these will give you your greatest learnings as well.

**Who inspires you in business?**

Again we go back to our parents as our first inspirations – all of whom share common ethics and values when it comes to business and the importance of hard work. The Brennans have also been a great inspiration to us in relation to The Bedford and we really value the advice they provided us with throughout the project; often it's only in hindsight that you realise how valuable these pearls of wisdom can be.