

## Guest Column: The Faces of Hospitality & Tourism

Like it or not, tourism is a top economic driver for San Juan County. Visitors “import” new dollars, which benefit small businesses, non-profits, and residents as these dollars circulate throughout our island communities. This series of columns will help put faces to this industry – innkeepers, tour captains, and other entrepreneurs who make our communities so unique and vibrant.

Anthony & Crystal came to Lopez in the Summer of 2013 to raise their young family. They fell in love with the island’s natural beauty as well as the strong sense of community. Among Anthony’s favorite things about island living is appreciating the isolation from the mainland that the ferry provides. It has kept the islands wild and beautiful while also fostering a strong sense of community on each island. Hiking Shark Reef with their children is a source of inspiration. The landscape and seascape are always different, and they leave with a great appreciation of the unique life we all enjoy here in the Islands. The Roventes also love freediving as a family in the San Juans and try to go out once a week all year long. As Anthony says, so few people know that the best views on the Islands are underwater!

When the opportunity arose to purchase the Edenwild Boutique Inn in 2015, they took it, despite limited previous experience in the hospitality industry but all the can-do attitude needed. Anthony says they’ve always dreamed of having a family business where he, Crystal, and their kids could all work together. The Edenwild is this dream come true, and all seven of their children are involved in the day-to-day operations.

While Edenwild is their family business, Anthony and Crystal also love supporting their boys in their related island business. Each boy has a food cart that sells hotdogs, ice cream, pretzels, or kettle corn. Teaching their children to be self-sufficient and hard-working has been the most meaningful part of the business for them.

### *How does tourism benefit the Islands?*

Tourists constantly remind us why we live here in the first place. When an island guest experiences one of the many parks and preserves for the first time and shares their feelings, you can't help but fall in love with the Islands all over again. Last weekend, a young couple asked Anthony to recommend a beach where they might find agates. When they came back, he asked if they found any, and she held out an engagement ring, saying, “He found me the perfect one!” Helping guests celebrate life’s milestones with their loved ones is by far the best part of working with visitors.

The COVID-19 pandemic was hands-down the most challenging time for them as a family business. San Juan County was one of the few places in the U.S. that shut down all short-term lodging. So, with the doors closed, Anthony and his boys began roofing houses and

doing general construction on the island until the ban was lifted. The silver lining of this difficult time was that they grew much closer as a family. Anthony says it's helpful for new business owners to recognize that some of the biggest challenges that island businesses face are also why the islands are such a special place to live. The San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau has done an amazing job of helping to balance this scale. Through it all, there has remained a sense of a rising tide supporting one another as we navigate the ongoing ferry issues and other uncertainties. This sense of community has helped us through uncharted waters before and will get us through again.