

AMANDA AND NICK HEMMING FBII ARE WINNERS OF THE COVETED BII LICENSEE OF THE YEAR AWARD TITLE - WHERE EVERY ELEMENT OF YOUR PUB OPERATION, STRATEGY AND TRADING RECORD ARE SCRUTINISED BY EXPERT INDUSTRY JUDGES. HERE THEY TALK ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS, THE HERON INN IN MALPAS, CORNWALL, THEIR SUCCESS AND WHAT WINNING MEANS TO THEM AND THEIR TEAM



INTERVIEW *with...*

Amanda & Nick Hemming

LOYA WINNERS 2022

Q Congratulations on being crowned winners of the BII Licensee of the Year Award 2022. Tell us about the last four months and what winning means to you?

Winning Licensee of the Year Award (LOYA) has put us on the map, says Amanda. We were doing well before, but have probably increased trade by 10-15% just from visitors and locals coming to see us after reading about our success in the news and on social media.

We've always attracted locals, but now people are driving 45 minutes from places like St Ives to visit.

Nick continues: People are coming in and comparing us to their experiences at other well-known restaurants in the region, and telling us that they enjoyed their visit to us more, which is a very nice compliment. It all builds awareness of the Heron Inn. We've never had to pay for marketing, with our success always having been driven by our social media and by developing a rapport with our customers.



St Austell, our brewery, has been brilliant too, creating lots of social media coverage for us, adds Amanda. There's a real buzz about the pub. Everyone wants to meet and speak to us. Customers are genuinely interested and want to know about the judging process.

Nick explains: It was St Austell Brewery that got us interested in the awards. We were their guests at the BII Summer Event in 2021. It was inspiring, seeing the finalists up on stage, and so we decided that we had nothing to lose by having a go ourselves.

It has been a huge boost for morale too. We took our team with us to the awards' lunch, and the whole event has become a special thing for them - something to share with their families and friends. They talk about our winning with passion and pride, says Amanda. We have a great team here and

when we look to expand, by taking on another one or two pubs, we will have people in place who are capable of running one of those other businesses.

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Q The award's judging process delves deep into every element of your business, from P&L to staff training. What are the stand-out elements of your business that you are most proud of?

For us it all comes down to our people. We are proud of how we bring new and young people into the business, individuals who want to forge a career in hospitality. We put a lot of time and effort into our team, knowing they will be the next generation of great operators, says Amanda.

Nick adds: If we don't attract youngsters into hospitality now, there's going to be no-one left to run our pubs in the next five to 10 years. Without their passion, energy and commitment, we can't be successful. It's a message that we have to get out there.

Off the back of winning LOYA this year, I've been invited to open the Fal Oyster Festival, with the Mayor this month (October). It's a massive local celebration and it's usually opened by well known chefs, like Nathan Outlaw and Pete Goss. But this year, I've been invited and it's a huge honour. I'll also get to cook with 10 school kids and I'll be able to talk about winning the award, plus tell everyone about the great career opportunities hospitality has to offer school and college leavers.

We have all got to remain focused on the long-term. The current cost of living crisis and supply issues will pass. We just need to concentrate on maintaining a successful business





PUB PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER CLEMOW ON GOOGLE.COM

and be positive. If we wobble, so will our team. We need to talk about all the good stuff – I still love what I do. Every day is different and there are so many rewards.

In the current trading climate, how do you maintain and continue to build the business? And

what strategies have you put in place for this winter?

Over the summer months, when the business has been in full swing, it's about keeping our heads down and working hard, says Amanda.

We like to stay on top of the trends to ensure we are offering the dishes that people will want to come out for, says Nick. We like to remain competitively priced too. For instance, when crab became very expensive, we dropped it from our menu. Now the price has fallen, we'll put crab back on.

It's important to keep having those conversations with suppliers. We have a fish of the day, so I need to understand what's coming in, what's the best buy, which fish prices will fall and what to stay away from. You've just got to stay on it. If you don't, you risk paying too much and you will put your business at risk, says Nick.

We will also stay on top of our service, which is about training and recruiting inhouse. We understand that people make a real effort to come to us, says Amanda. Creating a fabulous experience is what we are about. The Heron is located in an area of outstanding natural beauty and we want our customers to return soon and to bring along new friends.

We maintain a good spend per head, which is between £28 and £32, but on a good day that can go up to £36. We find that our customers are happy to spend more and will buy our more expensive wines. They aren't always looking at the price, says Nick, but more importantly for a great experience.

When it comes to the stuff outside of your control, like rent and energy costs, it's about being as careful as you can. We need to keep costs down and focus on maintaining profit.

We recently took on two chefs to live in, plus we have a live-in Manager who looks after the pub and our shop, The Heron Farm & Coffee Shop. Their package is rent free, bills included, which means our labour costs are slightly reduced. It's a good deal for them too. We had wanted to create B&B accommodation on site, but that's something we'll look to do in the future.

We have always invested in the business each year, but while the economy is so uncertain, we're going to sit tight, says Amanda. It's about taking the risks out, looking after the team and making sure we're in a secure position when things start to improve.

It's about knowing what's coming in versus what's going out. We set our managers' labour targets, to help control costs. We stagger start and



finish times too, so people will begin their shift at 12:00, instead of 11:30. It's only half an hour, but it all adds up.

We operate a four-day week for the busy kitchen staff during the summer months, and

we see the winter as our time to play: to visit suppliers, do training and be more relaxed.

Why would you recommend BII members enter the Licensee of the Year Awards?

It has been a huge eye-opener for us, says Amanda. It makes you assess your business. It's easy to become blinkered, when you're working in your pub

all of the time. I feel the judging process really delved deep into our soul. You have to be prepared for constructive criticism, but none of it is negative. It's about business improvement and how we can all do things better.

Nick adds: It was really good to get to meet other people too, from our fellow finalists to the judges. If you believe in your business, you can allow someone else to delve inside. If you don't share, you'll never get any better.

At the end of the day, we're just a small pub on the river in Cornwall. It was good fun to feel part of

something bigger and the event itself was brilliant. Our St Austell Area Manager, Clive Greene, even drove up from Cornwall on the day of the train strike to be with us. It was such a great day. ■



CREATING A BUZZ

The amount of marketing and PR that comes from with being involved in the Licensee of the Year Award (LOYA) is immense, says Nick and Amanda.

"The BII creates a great buzz around the competition at every stage, especially as finalists and winners, you become very visible. The BII is powerful and professional and you really benefit by being involved."