

For a vacation getaway, they never really left town

CAPE CHARLES -- Frank and Emily Cullen of Cape Charles recently took a special vacation to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary -- and traveled about a mile away to do it.

"One of our best vacations," said Frank Cullen about the couple's decision to spend their anniversary in Cape Charles about one mile away from their home as opposed to traveling long distances to a destination such as Arizona to see the Grand Canyon, which they had also considered.

"If you support the local economy, you are also supporting jobs -- which means you are supporting families," said Frank Cullen. "It is a good thing to do."

For their local vacation, they did what is typically done in planning for any vacation in selecting their lodgings, restaurants and activities.

During their getaway, they strolled into local shops, did sightseeing, met other vacationers, and took pictures to share with friends.

"There is so much to do here, we didn't even have time to do everything we wanted to do," said Emily Cullen.

The Cullens are business consultants, originally from New York. They bought property in Bay Creek in Cape Charles in 2004 and moved there permanently in 2009.

Emily Cullen said she works so much that they hadn't had a chance to spend a lot of time exploring the town.

They noted that sometimes people don't go to see places in their local area -- the same ones visitors will travel long distances to see and experience.

For example, Frank Cullen said he was in his 50s before he visited the Empire State Building even though he went to a high school that was only eight blocks away.

The Cullens stayed one night each at three of the bed and breakfast establishments in the town: Fig Street Inn, Sea Gate, and Cape Charles House.

How did they pack for this type of unique vacation? They packed light.

Emily Cullen said they packed a tiny suitcase with clothes and needed items for the day and would come back the next morning and "throw everything out and put new stuff in and go to the next place."

Frank Cullen said one night he forgot a prescription medication, but that is not a problem "when you are just a few blocks away."

The morning meals were at their lodgings, and they ate their lunches and dinners at local restaurants.

Cullen said they met other vacationers at their lodgings and enjoyed their breakfasts with the other guests.

Some of the typical vacationer introductory conversation included: "Where do you live?" to which the Cullens replied, "We live here."

He said they would then be asked, "Why are you here?" They would tell the other vacationers, which included guests from other states and countries, they had decided to take their vacation locally and the other guests thought it an interesting deal.

The Cullens spent their anniversary night of May 16 at Sea Gate, which was where they first stayed in Cape Charles when they came to look at property.

They said Chris Bannon, the owner of Sea Gate, had a bottle of wine for them in the room for their anniversary.

The Cullens reserved the wine room at

Aqua restaurant in Cape Charles and had eight of their friends join them for their anniversary evening. They were surprised when some of their friends arranged to have Heather and Nathan Travis of Cheriton there to sing for them.

Emily Cullen said they asked those who came to the anniversary party not to give them presents "but if they really felt they wanted to give us something, to donate to a local charity."

Some of the other places they dined included Coach House Tavern, Kelly's Gingernut Pub, Cape Charles Coffee House, and Hook U Up Gourmet. They also made reservations for recreational activities on the water.

"We got to know so much about the town we didn't know," said Emily Cullen, about having taken this time to explore and learn about the community.

'Inexpensive' vacation

They shopped at local establishments including Drizzles, Gull Hummock, Sullivan's Office Supply, and Breezes Day Spa, and said since the 25th anniversary is a silver anniversary they looked for things silver.

Frank Cullen said this was one of the most inexpensive vacations they have taken.

"Absolutely," said the Cullens when asked whether they would do this again and also look forward to visiting the other B & Bs in town they haven't been to yet.

"It is great fun," said Emily Cullen, saying they realized "why support an economy out west when our economy needs support," in referring to the Arizona vacation idea they had considered.

The couple had the highest accolades for each place they stayed and said the establishments were very different from each other.

Emily Cullen laughed recalling leaving Bruce and Carol Evans' Cape Charles House after their final night of vacation saying Carol Evans told them at their departure for their five-minute ride home, "Well, drive home safe."

"We usually welcome guests from other places -- it is such a great opportunity to welcome our own residents," said Evans later.

She noted the many positive aspects of the Cullens' creative vacation idea including no travel time, supporting local economy at

shops, restaurants, and lodgings, and taking the time to get to know your own town. She said everyone has been very impressed with the couple's creativity.

"It is a great shot in the arm for our community economically," said Evans, saying "it is also a neat idea."

"This was really special," said Frank Cullen, noting that with this type of vacation, people don't have many of the things associated with other vacations such as plane fares and car rentals, "so if you take the equivalent amount of money you can do an awful lot around in your own area."