



Lilly P. Bleil Photography

Linda Stewart is manager at Mathers Travel, a fourth-generation, family-owned travel business, on South Park Street in Halifax.

Touring the old-fashioned way

Mathers Travel sending people away since 1872

By Carol Johnstone
Special Features Writer

In a grey, Victorian, three-stoey house on South Park Street in Halifax, Chris Mathers talks quietly about his fourth-generation, family-owned business, Mathers Travel Ltd.

He's quite proud of this house. He finally bought it last October.

"When I first saw this building when we moved in here about 11 years ago, it just had that Victorian charm to it," he says. "It had strength, style and grace."

Established in 1872 in the time of sailing ships, Mathers Travel's logo is a compass rose.

"It doesn't really signify any mode of travel," Mr. Mathers says. "In all our years we've seen a lot of different changes in modes of transportation.

It basically signifies all directions and all different ways."

But at the same time, "instead of trying to be all to everybody, we're diversifying into smaller areas," he says. He's focussing on small group travel, conventions and cruises.

He values his agents' level of experience. Of 12 employees, five agents have more than 20 years experience and three more than 15. He keeps them all up-to-speed on technological advances and makes sure they travel, so that "there are not too many places in the world where somebody hasn't been.

One of Mathers most successful tours is the annual Literary Tuscany Tour to Italy led by Glenn Walton, a writer, journalist, award-winning filmmaker and university lecturer at Dalhousie.

Tours are limited to a maximum of eight. Participants receive a suggested reading list of such literary luminaries as E.M. Forester, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Michael Ondaajje, and Lord Byron and a list of art works that will be seen on the tour. The participating literati stay in small hotels and, in addition to touring, spend time sampling the

gustatory and Dionysian delights of the countryside.

For the past five or six years, Mathers Travel has also worked with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in planning its toms.

In April, AGNS will be taking 20 people on a tour called "Paris, the Loire and the Impressionist Landscapes" following up on its latest exhibit of Impressionist paintings that closed in January.

Not as glamorous perhaps, Mathers also specializes in being a one-stop shop for conventions. Delegates can now take care of their fare, hotel reservations, and convention registration all at the same time.

The U.S. dollar exchange rate has increased overall travel to Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Cruise travel is increasing in general due to its "all inclusive" nature and the ever increasing supply of cruise ships.

He's keeping his fingers crossed that travel jitters from the Sept. 11 tragedy will have calmed down early in the new year, so that "we'll either be going real crazy or we'll be going real crazy," he laughs.