

Where She Was Always Meant to Be

# JoAnn Viera

By Cynthia Robinson Photography by Mike Force Photography

For years, JoAnn Viera has looked at people who quit long time jobs to pursue their true passion with wonder and admiration. "I never thought I would be a person that made that leap," says JoAnn, who two years ago left Dartmouth, MA and her job of more than nine years to open the Darien River Front Inn. "I dreamed about it, but never thought it would be me, but now it is! I've never been happier."

While she was born and raised in Dartmouth, JoAnn always had a natural connection to the Peach State through her mother. "My mother is from north Georgia—Royston, the home of Ty Cobb," she says. "My sister, Janice (Chamberlin) moved to Georgia right out of high school. She and her husband, Bob, moved to Darien ten years ago and began operating the Blue Heron Inn, near the Sapelo Island ferry landing."

After repeated visits to Darien and the surrounding region, and her sister's repeated insistence that she should move to the area, JoAnn was hooked. "I knew five years ago that Darien was where I wanted to be, but didn't know what I would do or where I'd live," says JoAnn, a divorced single mother whose daughter, Erin, will graduate from high school in Dartmouth in 2013. "In 2009, my sister told me about an old tabby inn in Darien and wanted me to take a look."

While her initial plan was to look for a home and job in Darien after her daughter graduated, fate and her sister interceded. "In March 2012, I was visiting Jan and she mentioned the inn again," says JoAnn with a laugh. After getting a key to what was then more of a "fish camp" type of business, she took a look around the 100-year-old former warehouse and immediately saw potential.

JoAnn worked with her sister and brother-in-law to realistically crunch some numbers and made her decision. "Three days later I made the leap," JoAnn says.

"Although I was able to support my family with my job, I really hated it. Fortunately the company was offering package deals for people wanting to leave, and I got one. My house in Dartmouth sold in two weeks. Everything worked out and fell into place. You have to know things don't often align for me!" JoAnn laughed.

"Buying the inn got me where I wanted to be, gave me a great job and a place to live. I figured if my sister could do it, so could I," she says, laughing again. "I also had my sister's support that I could count on."

JoAnn immediately dove in full-time to transform what she calls a former "crashing place" for fishermen and their families into a homey seven-room bed and breakfast.

"It took about two months of hard work," says JoAnn, who repainted everything herself, but had some of the more complicated work, such as bathroom tiling, completed by local professionals.

"I redecorated each guest room adding my own touches. That was so much fun," adding that each room has its own private bath and theme. Ocean's Treasure is decorated in cool blues and whites with a sea shell quilt and sea glass art throughout. Another is a nautically-themed room decorated in the style of her native New England, while yet another pays homage to the South. What the rooms have in common is each opens to a wide porch facing the Darien River and the quaint waterfront, allowing guests to sit outside and enjoy the view.

"I had always said that I wanted to be a housewife because I loved taking care of a home and cooking, and this job is perfect for me," she says smiling. "All my life I felt like I was living in the wrong place. This is such a great town and everyone is so nice. I've made more friends here in the past two years that I have my entire life in Dartmouth."

In addition to the warmth of the people, JoAnn says she was impressed with the "amazing food" the area has to offer—quite a bit of it within walking steps of her inn.

"When I walked out on my porch the other morning with my coffee, and looked out over the water, I told myself, 'this is the view I had in my head five years ago.'"



## Up Close:

**Additional Family:** Son John, 24, and grandson, Landon, 20 months

**Education:** Liberal arts degree from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

**Innkeeper:** "I want to provide my guests with a relaxing experience. This is a no stress place!"

**Guests:** "We've had guests from 35 states and six countries—the furthest away was from Sweden."

**Other Interests:** Kayaking, working out, stained glass crafting and picture framing

