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Quebec City nuns find business solutions

The Order of the Augustinian Sisters of the Mercy of Jesus of Quebec are setting up a boutique hotel on the grounds of their monastery in Quebec City.



By: **Allan Woods** Quebec Bureau, Published on Thu Jul 02 2015

MONTREAL—Three French nuns stepped off their ship some 376 years ago in New France and wasted no time setting up Hôtel-Dieu, the first organized medical facility in the virgin lands that would come to be known as Quebec City.

Compared to founding the province’s health system, the current project of the Order of the Augustinian Sisters of the Mercy of Jesus of Quebec — setting up a boutique hotel on the grounds of their monastery — shouldn’t be a problem.

As men and women of the cloth all over Quebec struggle with the idea of selling off their property while trying to keep their purpose, the Quebec City nuns appear to have struck a balance.

First, they faced up to a harsh reality. Once an order that numbered as many as 800, the sisters were in fact closer to their golden years and, at 140 or so, were quickly dwindling.

Next, they employed some private-sector advisers to help them come up with a new purpose that agrees with their illustrious history.

The result was Le Monastère des Augustines, a hotel whose rooms are located in the restored, historic monastery and whose focus is on improving its visitors’ spiritual, physical and mental health.

“Converting a site is one thing, but converting a site and maintaining a vocation is another,” said Evan Price, chairman of the board of the non-profit group that will run the hotel.

“You could convert a site and convert it into condominiums. In this case, the nuns in this community

have always been about health and as they practice health care it was always the body and the soul, so there was always this global health perspective.”

Located in one of the wings of Hôtel-Dieu, the hotel in the walled-off section of Quebec City that got its start caring for aboriginals and European settlers will also contain a museum celebrating the contributions of the order of nuns since their arrival in 1639.

The nuns, who are represented on the hotel’s board, also hold some sway. They have ensured reduced rates for health-care workers in need of a rest, or family members of the sick who are looking for a getaway or have travelled to Quebec City from afar to be close to a loved one in hospital.

But another part of the clientele will undoubtedly include new-age seekers in search of a quasi-religious retreat.

Price said the hotel, which opens to the public in August, has adopted some of the rules you might find in a monastery, including a curfew, some restrictions on the use of phones and computers and quiet periods. There will also be some communal meals.

There will be crucifixes on the walls as a nod to history and a dozen or so nuns living in a separate wing of the monastery. Otherwise it will be an entirely secular, though spiritual, environment.

“As a society, a large part or a majority have turned their backs on traditional religion, but I think the spiritual side has remained and is very much there,” Price said of the hotel’s potential clients. “It’s just a question of finding the environment where it can be tapped into properly.”