

## Headwaters Tourism Awards recognized local achievement ? Alabaster Acres named Best New Tourism Business

By Bill Rea

Alabaster Acres has been operating less than two years, but it's already drawn recognition.

That includes being named the Best New Tourism Business at the recent Headwaters Tourism Awards.

Alabaster Acres is a family farm in Caledon village that specializes in growing heirloom produce and raising heritage breeds of livestock, as well as offering bed and breakfast, meeting facilities, an on-farm store, etc.

The award was sponsored by Humber College.

The operation represents an effort to explore the rural and agriculture lifestyle, according to Aimee Alabaster.

'We're reformed city slickers,' she remarked, adding she had an 'Aha moment.'

'This is my answer to it.'

Alabaster explained they have progressed from their corporate lives of moving from place to place, living in condos, etc. They are delving into the life of farming and sustainability, while sharing their knowledge through workshops and other programs.

There was also a desire to create a slower and more fulfilling life for herself and her two daughters, also ensuring they were in a setting where they got to know where their food came from.

Alabaster realized that would mean a change.

'I would have to get out of the corporate life, and not work so hard and have a more fulfilling life,' she explained.

She also said they wanted to inspire more community-minded people and attract them to what they are doing.

'This was a natural evolution,' she explained.

The result is Alabaster Acres holds workshops and hands-on learning experiences, providing a place for people to get to know about farming and sustainability. There are seasonal workshops, as well as sessions for people interested in raising backyard hens.

Winning the award was a great honour and an acknowledgement of what they are trying to do.

'We're very grateful and honoured to be even shoulder-to-shoulder with these great tourism businesses in the Headwaters region,' she declared. 'We feel it's a great honour.'

Alabaster Acres was also up for the Best Nature and Leisure Visitor Experience award. That other nomination was a surprise, Alabaster admitted.

'We really just champion the spirit of the tourism industry here,' she said, adding it's about building community and bringing people together.

The Orangeville Town Hall Opera House was filled with tourism and community leaders for the recent awards ceremony.

It was an evening of celebration, honoured those tourism businesses and individuals who, during 2017, exemplified excellence.

The winners in other categories were Dragonfly Arts on Broadway in Orangeville ? Best Arts and Heritage Experience; Snowberry Botanicals in Erin ? Best Fresh and Local Visitor Experience; Mud Hero Toronto North in Caledon and Caribfest (Soulyve) in Orangeville ? tied for Best Fun and Festive Visitor Experience; Seven Bridges Run (Orangeville Lions Club) ? Best Nature and Leisure Visitor Experience; Grand River RAM Rodeo in Grand Valley ? Best Horse and Country Visitor Experience; Millcroft Inn and Spa of Alton and Wicked Shortbread of Orangeville ? tied for Best See, Shop and Stay Visitor Experience; Credit Valley Conservation (Island Lake Amphitheatre) in Mono ? Tourism Innovator of the Year; Lavender Blue Catering of Mono ? Tourism Partnership Award; and Philip DeWar (Soulyve) of Orangeville ??Tourism Champion of the Year.



Aimee Alabaster holds the Best New Tourism Business Award from Headwaters Tourism.