

# Aiken Standard

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## It's Your Story: The Willcox is one of Aiken's landmarks

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Jul 24, 2022



One of Aiken's most prominent landmarks is also one of the oldest, with The Willcox playing host to thousands of guests from around the world, whether in connection with golf, polo, business or simply the chance to unwind in one of the South's most highly rated hotels.

The Willcox's date of establishment is reflected in its phone number – 803-648-1898 – and its century-plus history includes such guests as Winston Churchill, Harold Vanderbilt and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The past decade alone has brought dozens of accolades from such observers as Travel + Leisure, Conde Nast, Southern Living, and Wine Spectator. With the most recent being No. 11 Top Hotels in The South Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards, 2021, No. 4 Best Hotel in South Carolina Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards 2021, TripAdvisor Travelers Choice Award and the Wine Spectator Restaurant Award.

The first decade of the 21st century, however, included some hair-raising moments for the full-service hotel's employees and aficionados. The current owners, Geoffrey and Shannon Ellis, came on board in 2009, opening the hotel's restaurant, and within two months of opening were told The Willcox would be closing forever on Jan. 1, 2010 and as general manager Tina McCarthy shared, "with only 10 minutes to spare, the Ellis's purchased the hotel just before the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve 2009".

The word "inn" was once part of the establishment's name, but was dropped in order to help reflect the idea of "a full-service boutique hotel," said Tina. Noting that the restaurant and our lobby bar are open daily and guests enjoy dining in the lobby, by the pool, on the front porch or in the dining room. We also have a salon and spa that's open to the public and cater onsite and off-site events.

"As a company, sustainability is very important to our practices. We're part of the South Carolina Green Alliance and each department has sustainability practices. As a team, we continue to seek out ways to reduce our impact on the environment and increase our use of sustainable resources. We do this because it's the right thing to do. It's healthier for our employees, and our guests, and better for the environment.

We, of course, attract out-of-town guests, which we love to have, but we also love our locals. We think of our lobby as the 'living room of the community' and are so appreciative of our local support and patronage. It's a mix of both customers that make us who we are and continuing the passion to provide the best Southern hospitality that we are known for."

She added, "Our atmosphere is casually elegant. You see guests arriving after riding, or playing golf as well as dressed to go to the theater. That is the beauty of it ... we're elegant but casual and we want to keep it that way.

A key concept is that of being "a personal hotel," she said. "It's us getting to know people and their needs and wants, and ... the experience is the difference, because you can have a beautiful place everywhere, but it's ... the special little touches that make that happen."

She added, "We are fortunate to have the opportunity to preserve such a gem and are committed to preserving the legacy of The Willcox for generations to come."