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HOSPITALITY BORDERING HOSTILITY

CANADA CHECKS OUT

For hospitality businesses along the Canadian border, months of geopolitical sparring have taken a toll



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When he's not building, Bill Devine tells stories. ¶ The 83-year-old Vietnam veteran once crushed his hand at a cannery in Alaska when he was a young man but was back to work a few days later. He later worked as a hunting guide in Alaska and once had to make multiple trips carrying 150 pounds of moose at a time 10 miles from the spot of the kill back to camp. His typing skills eventually landed him a post under future Secretary of State Alexander Haig during Vietnam. Devine has a signed copy of Haig's 1992 book "Inner Circles," complete with dozens of post-it notes to mark passages on yellowed pages.

Devine's current venture is based on a 100-acre property near Maple Falls he bought in 1973. He operates two lodging suites, dubbed Mt. Baker View Lodging, in a separate home secluded in the mountains behind his own.

Devine runs the lodge with his wife, Julie, who also runs a berry stand across the street. He and his family built everything on the property.

But the fruits of all their labor seem less certain this year.

Mt. Baker View Lodging is 16 miles from the Canadian border, and Canadians were once regular visitors to the lodge and the berry stand. That has declined in recent years, starting with the pandemic, and it has been even more pronounced this year.

Fewer cars are traversing Route 542, and Julie says the berry stand numbers are down 50% this year. The lodge, too, saw about a 50% drop in business this summer compared with summers past, Devine says.

The Devines' struggles are emblematic of a larger problem gripping Washington tourism businesses near the Canadian border, where the fallout from President Donald Trump's verbal sparring with the Great White North has hit places like

Mt. Baker View Lodging.

Trump's references to Canada as the "51st state," plus an ongoing trade dispute, have made it politically popular in Canada to shun the U.S. Personal vehicle crossings from Canada to Washington are down 23% this year.

Washington business owners are doing what they can to welcome their northern neighbors, but the geopolitical rhetoric has dinged parts of the state's economy that rely on Canadian spending.

"The longer this manifests itself, then the more at risk those behaviors become," says Ross Siemens, mayor of Abbotsford, B.C. "If this doesn't get resolved in the near future, then some of those changes will become more lasting, and everybody loses on that front."

'They might not come back'

Sixteen miles southwest of Abbotsford sits Lynden, where Teri Treat toured a fire-damaged husk of a century-old building about 10 years ago. Despite the damage from a 2008 fire, she ended up buying into the property with her husband and now owns it with another couple.

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Bill Devine, left, and his wife, Julie, met in Thailand 23 years ago. In addition to Mt. Baker View Lodging, the couple runs a berry stand.