

TOURISM



by Bill Nehmy

I am pleased to introduce Michelle Wallis (pictured) from the pioneering Wallis family who run Cinemas at Mount Barker, Mitcham, Noarlunga, North Adelaide, Mildura, Mainline Drive In Gepps Cross and Auchendarroch House in Mt Barker.

BN: Welcome Michelle, please can we start with your early years, where you were born, went to school, your early plans and aspirations?

MW: I was born in Glenelg and went to Oaklands Primary, now Westfield Marion, and later went to Glengowrie High. I grew up surrounded by the film industry and always wanted to be involved since I was very little.

When I was younger I helped my Grandfather around the drive-ins from where the company really started. With my father Bob Wallis I'd bag confectionery on our billiard table at home for the cinemas.

Leaving high school in Year 10, I went to Hales College studying business. From there I had the opportunity to work for a solicitor, Ian Berry Insurance Brokers and also Coca Cola.

My involvement in the cinema industry began at the Academy Cinema City in the city and Glenelg Cinemas, where I had multiple roles.

I learnt the business from the bottom up which helped me in my understanding of the business.

BN: Please can you elaborate on Auchendarroch House in Mount Barker and the integration of heritage with cinema and restaurant/meeting facilities?

MW: My father Bob Wallis purchased the site in 2000. His main interest was

the introduction of cinemas to the Hills, but fell in love with the old house and could see its long term potential for Mt Barker and the surrounding area.

What began as a long journey to revitalise and restore the wonderful former Barr Smith residence is still continuing today.

Unfortunately my father passed away in 2007 and the responsibility to maintain and restore Auchendarroch has now fallen to me – a responsibility I take very seriously as I am very passionate about realising my father's dream to make Auchendarroch an entertainment hub for the area.

I am proud to say that we have come a very long way in restoring the beauty of the house and gardens plus providing a quality restaurant and the cinema for everyone to enjoy.

BN: If you have visiting friends or relatives and you want to give them a memorable Adelaide Hills day, what do you recommend?

MW: That is easy – while you are in the area you can visit the wineries or boutique breweries, try the chocolate factory, visit the National Motor Museum, pick strawberries or take the kids to visit the farm animals or wildlife at Cleland or Gorge Wildlife Parks.

Then you can pop into Auchendarroch House, tour the gardens, sit on the licensed croquet lawns under the giant elm and enjoy the sunshine, have lunch in Oak & Iron bistro or grab a pizza from Thriller.

Take in a new release movie at the Cinema and then come back to Oak & Iron and try a piece of home-made cake and coffee. A great day out.

BN: What do you think is the most significant tourism opportunity waiting to be realised in the Adelaide Hills?

MW: I think there are endless opportunities for people to experience the Adelaide Hills. There are obviously



many fabulous things for interstate and overseas tourists to do, but I believe we need to tell South Australians just how close the Adelaide Hills is to them and just how much they are missing by not visiting their own backyard.

There are also endless opportunities for conferences, functions and weddings in the Adelaide Hills.

We are closer to the city than people think and have everything you could need and so much more. Auchendarroch House itself has a variety of different size function rooms, a huge licensed lawn area, an executive chef and the added benefit of the cinema which can be used for conferences or just for some entertainment.

BN: Please share any other key interests/activities that might surprise us.

MW: I love movies and roses and have discovered I can mix the two. I have been exited to discover the variety of roses, like the Cinderella Rose, Aloha, Popcorn, Candy Eyes, Marilyn Monroe and Some Like it Hot that have been created to celebrate the movie industry, and I have delighted in planting them at Auchendarroch.

Thanks Michelle for giving us the opportunity to get to know you and Wallis Cinemas including the iconic Auchendarroch House better.