

• GLORIA DEUTSCH

**W**hat do we do now?" was the question Chana and Shmuel Veffer asked themselves when they made aliya in August 2009.

Shmuel, a management consultant turned rabbi and teacher in Yeshivat Aish HaTorah, inventor and founder of Kosher Innovations, had lived here with his wife, Chana, from 1983 until 1998 and had been called back to Toronto to work for the Aish community there. The year that it was supposed to be stretched into 11, and when they finally came back they had no idea what they were going to do next.

But a series of events led them to what they do now with great success and joy. They own and run Villa Rimona in the Lower Galilee village of Yavne'el and welcome guests from all over the world to their three *tzimmerim*. It was a completely new departure for them; but as Shmuel says, "Chana has been opening her home and welcoming people all her life and is a great hostess."

The decision to do it for a living is something they are both thrilled about. All they want now is for other like-minded "empty-nesters" to join them in their idyll.

#### FIRST ALIYA

They were both born and raised in Toronto and both became religious before they met and married in 1982. He had a degree in math and computer science and she in psychology. Soon after marrying, they arrived in Jerusalem, where Shmuel got a job running the IBM distributorship while helping to build Aish HaTorah on the side.

"I was asked to work full time in the management of the yeshiva, which was a big decision to make, as it meant leaving private enterprise and moving to the nonprofit world. But we felt it was a good environment for us to raise our family," he says.

Shmuel studied to become a rabbi while also teaching and using his other skills to automate and manage the yeshiva. Then the organization summoned him back to Toronto, and they reluctantly went.

"The idea was to set up a synagogue and build an outreach community there," he says.

During the eight years, he created Kosher Innovations and invented the Shabbat lamp, which stays lit all Shabbat but has a sliding door to cover the light at night.

"Being a management consultant means problem solving and sideways thinking," explains Shmuel. Later he invented a Shabbat toothbrush and a Shabbat clock but eventually sold the business and returned to Israel.

#### SECOND ALIYA

The second time around, they moved to Beit Shemesh and began dealing in real estate.

"I feel very strongly that Jews abroad should invest in property here," says Shmuel. "It makes a psychological connection to the country; and when they eventually do want to come, they've hedged their investment. They can always sell if they want to move to another part of the country. Settling the Land



**THE VEFFERS** call their guest house Villa Rimona because of the pomegranate trees that grow in their garden.

## A welcome change

The couple have opened a guest house in the Lower Galilee and would like others to follow suit

of Israel is a great mitzva, and anything that helps the economy, such as owning property here, is all part of helping build the land."

During the course of their work they "stumbled on Yavne'el," as they put it.

"We were looking for properties for someone who wanted to start farming in the North, and our search brought us to the village of Yavne'el, about 15 minutes from Lake Kinneret at the foot of Mount Tabor," Shmuel explains.

#### DECISIVE MOVE

"We fell in love," they say simply. The view, the mixed hassidic (Bratslav) and secular community of 3,000, the proximity to the big city (Tiberias) and yet being in the depth of the countryside.

"Let's do *tzimmers*," said Shmuel. Chana had her doubts and worried about being able to cope with the work involved. But she fitted into the role of hostess to perfection.

#### RUNNING THE BUSINESS

The Veffers called their guest house Villa Rimona because of the pomegranate (*rimon*) trees that flourish in their garden. There are

also grapefruit trees. When Chana serves freshly picked grapefruit as part of her breakfast, she says it has special meaning for a native of Toronto, where ice and snow are the order of the day.

There are three guest units with self-catering facilities, and they can accommodate up to 20 people.

"I have catered for entire Shabbatot, and I do breakfast for people who don't live in Israel; but most of our guests are young Israeli families who prefer to do their own catering," she says.

She also provides a list of activities for the visitors and recommends tourist attractions near and far. Just down the road is a marzipan factory; and nearby, at Shadmot Dvora, one can learn all about bee-keeping in a fascinating tour of the moshav.

With their six children all settled in good jobs or challenging study programs, the Veffers feel they have found the perfect place and would like others to join them.

"We feel that we've broken the ice and that others like us – *shomrei Shabbat*, Anglo empty-nesters – would be equally happy here. We'd like to build a community and actively encourage people to come and live here."