

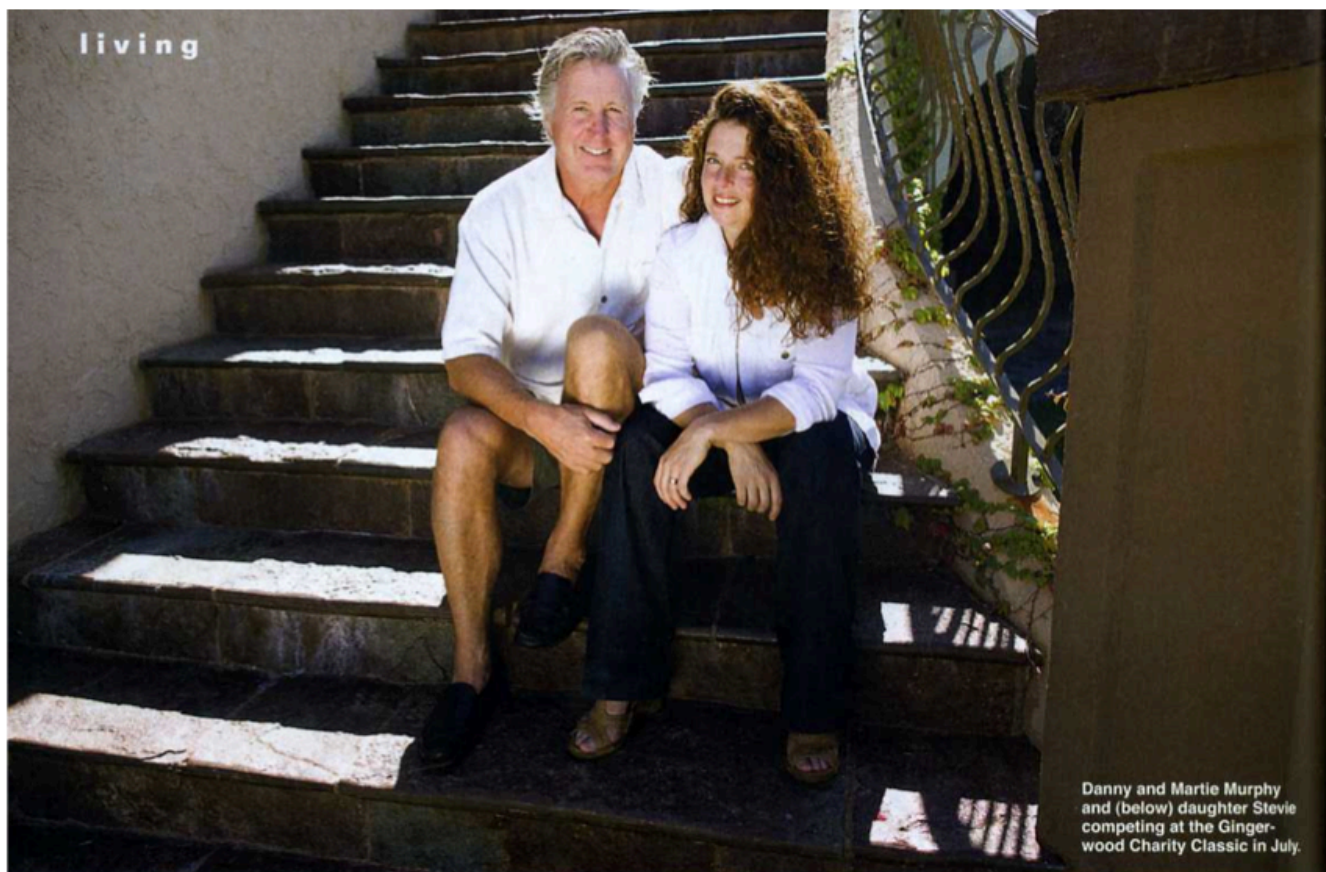


*Entrepreneurs Danny and Martie Murphy have built a home and lifestyle in Stanhope's cottage country that is designed around family, horses, and their love of everything that P.E.I. has to offer.*

*A beacon for local charities, Gingerwood functions seamlessly as a fundraising venue and cozy haven for the couple and their six children.* BY MARJORIE SIMMINS, PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDOR FIZLI



living



Danny and Martie Murphy and (below) daughter Stevie competing at the Gingerwood Charity Classic in July.

The glossy chestnut tucks up his forelegs to clear the first of eight obstacles on the Grand Prix competition field. The young rider is so slight, it's hard to imagine how she navigates a full ton of powerful horse around the course. Onlookers seated in bleachers applaud a successful round.

Overlooking the course is a three-storey stone villa with a full-length terrace. An equestrian judge sits there, along with an announcer, sponsors, and assorted guests of the host family. Surrounding the house are 50 acres, two sides bordered by national park land and another by cottage country. The Atlantic Ocean is a navy ribbon on the northern horizon. The air smells of baked earth and grass, along with wafts of burgers and fries from a nearby canteen.

It's show day at Gingerwood in Stanhope, P.E.I., the home of husband-and-wife franchise and business dynamos Danny and Martie Murphy. "We bought the property from a man named 'Ginger' MacKay," says Danny. He sweeps an arm toward the tree line. "Ginger, wood—we thought it was nice to keep his







Murphy daughters  
Dannie (left) and Stevie

name connected to the place."

The Murphys own D.P. Murphy Inc., a company Danny began in 1980 with the purchase of two Tim Hortons' franchises in Charlottetown. The company currently owns and operates all 19 Tim Hortons in P.E.I., as well as five hotels, including the Stanhope Beach Resort. It also owns nine Wendy's Restaurants in P.E.I. and Quebec and has other interests around the Maritimes. In 1995 Danny masterminded the Tim Hortons/Wendy's merger. Now a total of 1,200 people are employed in the Murphys' restaurants and hotels.

Married for 15 years, Martie and Danny each share a powerful drive for doing business, but they also have individual entrepreneurial strengths. "I enjoy putting a deal together—buying the land, getting the financing," says Danny. "Then Martie moves in to do the construction and design work."

Today, however, is not about business. In full swing is the fifth annual Gingerwood Charity Classic Hunter Jumper Show, consisting of six days of show jumping. It's a national competition, and with 133 competitors it's the largest outdoor equestrian event in Atlantic Canada. All proceeds go to the Oak Acres Children's Camp in Murray River, owned by the Sisters of St. Martha and operated by the Murphys.

Each year nearly 500 Island children who have been selected by guidance counsellors attend the camp for free. "We try to give kids a leg up for life," says Danny. The Charity Classic is a popular community event, but it's just one of dozens of fundraising efforts hosted by the Murphys each year at Gingerwood. It's also a favourite of the couple, who have six children. "Our kids are the best part of our lives," says Martie. "That's why we're so passionate about Oak Acres."

Alberta-born Martie first met Danny in Toronto in 1985 when he was in town on Tim Hortons business; Martie, a franchise owner in Lethbridge, was there on Wendy's business. Both had married young and divorced, and both had been

single for several years. Danny had joint custody of his two daughters, Karen and Laura, while Martie didn't have any children. "We ended up at the airport together," says Martie. "We started talking and laughing and had a nice time. I said, 'I better watch the time or I'll miss my plane.' And he said, 'I already missed mine.'"

Airplanes would play a big part in the early part of their relationship. "It was long distance at first," says Martie. "So for two years we did a lot of flying back and forth across the country. It was Canadian Airlines in those days, and in a big way they were responsible for keeping us together."

Which is why on one of their cross-country flights together, Danny felt





compelled to thank the airline on the public-address system, then propose marriage to Martie. "There were about 300 people onboard," recalls Martie. Surprise made her hesitate, but not for long. "I said yes, and everyone started cheering. The flight attendants opened a bottle of champagne. It was very romantic." It also showed confidence on Danny's part. "He has always been a risk-taker," says Martie.

An accomplished equestrian who had competed since she was seven, Martie and her four horses relocated to P.E.I. in 1995. The Murphys now have four children together: daughters Stevie, 14, Dannie, 10, and Georgie, 8, and son Will, 12. The girls all ride horses, while Will prefers to play golf. Other members of the Murphy household include an Irish wolfhound, two mini-dachshunds, and a 41-year-old Newfoundland Pony named Drew (short for Prince Andrew).

Danny Patrick Murphy started his first business at age 13, with help from his brother Kevin. "There was a lot of construction going on near our house," says Danny, who was born and raised in Charlottetown.

The boys saw an opportunity in the form of the thirsty construction workers labouring on the sites. "We bought hundreds of bottles of pop and put them in our basement," says Danny. "At around 10 o'clock every morning, we'd go to the sites and sell the pop. Then at midnight we'd go back and pick up all the empty bottles [to get the return fees]."

That experience taught Danny an important business principle: If something works well, perfect the process and repeat it. Two years later he did exactly that, although the money-making venue was different. "My mother came from a religious family—her brother was a priest and two sisters were nuns—and she wanted me to think about the priesthood," says Danny, who along with his six brothers and one sister was raised Roman Catholic. At age 15, at his mother's prompting, Danny attended a three-day retreat for young men who were considering the priesthood at Mount St. Mary's of Charlottetown. Gathered together were about 25 boys aged 14 and 15. "I took orders from the kids for pop and had Kevin deliver it to the retreat," he says, laughing at the memory.

Throughout high school, Danny worked in restaurants and bars. By his



early 20s, he was a part-time doughnut baker at a Tim Hortons. In 1980 he graduated from the University of Prince Edward Island with a degree in psychology and began to think seriously about his career goals. "I had been working in restaurants and bars for so long, doing all the things an owner would do—hiring, management, deposits—that I thought, why don't I buy my own business?" he says. When he learned that the owner of his Tim Hortons location, who ran two stores, was planning to retire, Danny called Ron Joyce, the head of the national Tim Hortons' empire.

"I said I wanted to buy the franchises," says Danny, who was 23 at the time. "He told me I was too young. Then I met him at a charity event and he said we could talk again in six months." Joyce probably thought Danny would change his mind or, more likely, be unable to obtain the startup funds.

"I needed \$255,000," says Danny. "I borrowed \$35,000 from my brother Shawn, another \$35,000 from my father, who remortgaged his house to give me the money, and \$185,000 from the Bank of Montreal." Danny repaid his family as quickly as he could. His gratitude for their faith in him remains strong today. His father was a retired Department of Fisheries and Oceans area manager, and the family home was likely worth little more than the loan.



A large, ornate, gold-colored initial letter 'B' with a decorative flourish extending from the top.

Both Danny and Martie are committed to giving back to their families, community, and country. They host at least 30 charity events at Gingerwood each year, including auctions, all-star music nights, and gourmet dinner parties. Among the recipient charities are the Alzheimer's, Easter Seals, and Autism Societies; the CNIB; the Canadian Cancer and Joyriders Associations; TimBit Island Minor Hockey; KidSport Canada; and the Special Olympics.

The house's gracious proportions are ideal for large gatherings. "Martie designed it," says Danny. "She drew it up on a napkin, then hired a draftsman to make the construction plans." Martie and her team worked together on the project for a year. Both Murphys refer to the house as "old world" or European, with its stonework, great hall, massive fireplace, and villa-style accents.

"My inspiration came from the tiles," says Martie of the multi-coloured Italian stone covering the main floor. "They're from Tuscany. I saw them in a magazine and said, 'That's my floor.' " Then she looks down at her mud-covered riding boots. "I also wanted a house where people could walk in and keep their shoes on. The tiles were perfect—rare and beautiful, and yet they don't show marks of any kind."

Martie also wanted a main floor with no central staircase in sight, so visitors wouldn't wander upstairs to their private rooms. Putting the two staircases out of view, at opposite ends of the main floor, means the family can move through the house without bumping into guests. The arched mezzanine rail, with its coloured steelwork, was created by a Welsh-born Island artist. The mezzanine leads from the children's bedrooms to the spare and main bedrooms.

A private theatre, a steam room, multi-purpose rooms, and large bar area,



in which charity auctions are sometimes held, comprise the ground floor. "The Island has a strong culture of giving," says Martie, who returns to Lethbridge several times a year to visit her family. "Alberta is driven by the oil industry; it's more of a commerce-type of environment. Here we have farming, fishing, and tourism. Everybody knows everybody; Island people are incredibly connected and generous, and willing to go the extra mile. So many people give their time, money, and expertise. It's also a fabulous place to raise kids." Danny agrees that they're lucky to live in P.E.I. "We don't have to worry about where the kids are or traffic," he says. "The golfing, beaches, lobster, seafood, and lifestyle—we don't take any of it for granted."

Martie and Danny credit their business success to the people who work "with" them, not "for" them. "We're successful because of the people who work at D.P. Murphy," says Martie. "They're amazing, and they donate their time to charity too. We couldn't do our philanthropic work without our incredible volunteers."

For the Murphys, the future looks as bright and busy as ever. "We'd like to build more hotels in the region," says Danny. "We have five on the Island, and we'd like to have a regional hotel company with hotels in Sydney, Fredericton, and Dartmouth—maybe 10 in the next five or six years." He pauses, then flashes a big smile, adding, "I like to have a project or two on the go." 🏡