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Staff Photo / Jamie Scott Lytle

Dan Royce, shown with his dog at his home, has retired after almost 20 years as manager of the Rancho Santa Fe Inn.

Innkeeper puts his career to bed

By Leslie Ridgeway
Staff Writer

RANCHO SANTA FE — Dan Royce woke up one morning, got dressed and put on a necktie.

He looked down at the tie and suddenly realized he was retired.

"For goodness' sake, why am I wearing this?" he asked himself as he removed the tie and remembered that on Jan. 1, he retired after almost 20 years as innkeeper of the Rancho Santa Fe Inn.

Royce, 65, actually has been associated with the inn since 1958, when his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Royce, bought it from the estate of George Richardson. The place was managed by the couple's daughter and son-in-law, Dorothy and Wes Hadden, until 1971, when Hadden died. In 1972, Dan Royce, who was working at a hotel in Pasadena, moved to Rancho Santa Fe and took the reins.

Royce is a third-generation hotelier, working for the Sheraton corporation and running his own hotel in La Jolla for a while. His father owned the Huntington hotel in Pasadena, the Fairmont in San Francisco and was managing director of the Hotel del Coronado for 12 years, he said. His grandfather also owned several hotels.

Growing up in the hotel business gave Royce a love for working with people, both guests and employees, he said.

"I've met some interesting people," he said. "And the activity of the business is interesting. You have to deal with business problems, but this is a primarily people-oriented business."

Although Rancho Santa Fe is home to some famous people and is visited by celebrities, Royce said he doesn't remember many who stayed at the inn because he never treated those guests differently than others.

"Celebrities stayed here because we didn't treat them like celebrities," he said.

He won't be working at the inn anymore, but Royce said he'll still be a presence there.

"I'm just moving my office across the street," he said. There, he will handle inn business and manage other property the family owns, he said.

Retiring means an escape from "the day-to-day details" and a chance to enjoy himself, Royce said. Immediately after officially retiring, Royce took a trip to Beaver Creek, Colo. for a week of skiing. In addition, he looks forward to more time to play his favorite sport, tennis, and swim.

Royce lives in Rancho Santa Fe,

which he called "a delightful community."

"It's an island in a sea of subdivisions," he said. "I'm finding that a lot of people from Los Angeles and Newport Beach are moving here to get away from the subdivisions."

Selecting a successor could have been a difficult task, but Royce said his daughter, also in the hotel business, and a friend recommended Ross Bell, who had worked with the Sheraton corporation for years, he said.

The inn will not be sold and there will be no changes in policy or operation, Royce said. Duncan Hadden, son of Dorothy and Wes Hadden, will remain as director of sales, and Royce and his wife Barbara's daughter Betsy will continue as director of food and beverage.

Royce will remain chairman of the board and president of The Huntington Hotel Co., the family held corporation that owns the inn. He is president of the Independent Innkeepers Association.

The inn also will participate actively in the community, as it always has, Royce said.

"Rancho Santa Fe means too much to me, the Royces and the inn to change anything," he said. "As someone nicely said, they look upon the inn as their club without dues."

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