

## POCONO RECORD

By MARIA HORN

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### In Delaware Water Gap, Castle Inn's shops are fit for king or pauper

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And excitement is building again as owners Frank Paccione and Theresa Veltri eagerly anticipate the 35th annual Celebration of the Arts (COTA) Jazz Festival, which is the peak time of the year for the eclectic array of businesses housed at the Castle Inn. While many Pocono businesses thrive on the entire summer season, the Castle Inn and other Delaware Water Gap borough businesses depend on shoppers off two events that take place early and at the end of the summer season: Founder's Day in the last weekend of June and COTA that takes place on Sept. 7-9.



PHOTO / M. HORN/POCONO RECORD

The historic Castle Inn in Delaware Water Gap, opening in 1909, now houses shops and offices.

"We're very excited. That's the focal point of the year for us," Veltri said. "We always plan around the jazz festival because people come from all over. It's a first rate music festival. It gives us exposure for people who normally would not come to the Gap and the Castle because the event is sitting within our property. It comes with a certain spirit."

And that encourages patrons to buy items reflective of the area. They'll find plenty of that at Castle Inn.

The Castle Inn once was the last of the great hotels in Delaware Water Gap when it was a heralded vacation refuge in the early 1900s before the automobile's rising popularity drew tourists to farther destinations. It still carries that vintage ambiance, sitting on the edge of town near the historic Deer Head Inn that inspired COTA. The Castle is just off Route 611 on 49 Waring Drive, a street named after legendary band leader Fred Waring, who entertained national audiences in the 1950s. Hikers trekking the Atlantic seaboard also find the Castle a worthwhile stop as they take a respite in that area.

"I think people get that (sense of history) and feel it immediately," Paccione said. "You get comments like it just makes them happy to be there, as it does us. I think we've been successful in creating that feeling with nostalgia as well as it being a pleasant place to be."

"What I enjoy is seeing people not from the area and not familiar with the history come in and get interested, including many people who are younger."

Strollers can't miss the giant hedge-hewn squirrel enjoying an ice cream cone that signals Zoe's Ice Cream Emporium, a Victorian style parlor where Paccione fulfills his dream of being a soda jerk serving in the classic setting. He and Veltri bought the property in 2005 and began work on it two years later, restoring the ice cream shop to its original splendor from a century ago. They named after their granddaughter. Not wanting to be outdone by his sister, their grandson requested a shop to be named after him. Just down the original tile walkway is Orion's Toy Works, which features educational toys and games, many of which are made by the Melissa & Doug Co.

The colonnade is lined with a variety of shops to rouse all senses. The Castle Inn Gallery is currently featuring local artist Jose Santamaria of neighboring Shawnee-on-Delaware. Wrought-iron tables and chairs provide seating and a place to enjoy treats from the Candy Cottage or a \$5 lunch at Zen Safari Ethnic Arts Center where Nyrvah Richard, originally from Haiti, sells an assortment of art, both functional and decorative. "I've traveled the world to pick up art, but found recipes, too," Richard said. One of her most popular: dumplings.

Other intriguing shops include Memory Lane Antiques, D.M. Studios Custom Framing, Camp Pocono Antiques, Sherri's Bags and Baubles, JS Advanced Skin Care beauty spa, Eileen Noelle Photography, Custom Creations Tailoring and the Auction House. Recent additions are Mountain View Vineyard and Memory Lane Antiques and other offices.

"We planted a grape vine and the next day, the winery people came and said they wanted a space," Veltri said. "We've had serendipitous things happening."

"It's all coming along and it's very rewarding. It's a money pit but we love it and we're making a lot of progress with a lot of changes," said Veltri said the first two floors and part of the third are rented, saying, "The big news is that we started work on the dining hall off the courtyard in the back and the windows. We're doing it bit by bit. Hopefully by next year, we'll have a grand opening."

The dining room accommodated many guests of Waring and other notables before that.

Opera legend Enrico Caruso stayed there. So did composer John Philip Sousa. Gene Tunney trained there in 1927 for his fight with Jack Dempsey, the famed Long Count Fight at Soldier Field in Chicago in which Tunney was able to rise from a knockdown and defend his world title.

"Many people in the area have a story associated with this place," said Paccione. "I feel over the last year, a lot has come together with the offices on the second floor. People have started looking at space on the third floor and the ground floor has been buzzing. There's a synergy with the offices and the shops."

The dedicated efforts of Veltri and Paccione have been hailed by local historic organizations since they took over the vacant property — the main building housed Shawnee Press, started by Waring, from 1953 until it moved in 2004 to Nashville.

Waring's son — Malcolm Waring — has a real estate office on the second floor of the building — Waring Bowman Realty. "It's wonderful having the Waring name back," Veltri said.

"The hardest part was getting the flow of shops right. I think we've pretty much got that," Veltri said. "There's a circular flow to everything. People come in for one thing and then go to another area and find something that also is for them."

The owners completed restoring the facade in time in 2008 for the COTA music festival that year. It included the difficult process of removing many coats of paint that, oddly, covered and concealed a beautiful mosaic sign displaying "1906" — the year when construction began for the inn for its grand opening in 1909, which is listed on a step of the building.

Only a few steps away from the inn will be the concert stages where many jazz legends will be playing over the holiday weekend — and attracting curious visitors and return patrons back to the Castle Inn who remember it while attending past COTA festivals.

Interested businesses can call the Castle Inn at 570-421-8483.

Business Editor Wayne Witkowski contributed to this article.