

History makes itself at home in Cedarville



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CEDARVILLE, Ohio — On the former site of a grain silo, in a town where the "Father of Labor Day" was born, Stuart and Ruth Zaharek envisioned a country inn hotel where guests could relax amid the "casual elegance" of a Victorian bed-and-breakfast and the "rustic natural appeal" of a mountain lodge.

Their visual masterpiece was brought to life with the newly-built, 20-room Hearthstone Inn & Suites, where the amazing interior resembles the Thomas Kinkade painting that is displayed above the fireplace mantel.

This very unique hotel celebrates its grand opening this month.

In the lounge, an American flag hangs from a 19th century-replica chandelier. Inviting English-style sofas and armchairs face a stone fireplace that stretches from the floor to the 22-foot-high ceiling. Civil War artifacts occupy the shelves of display cases.

In the dining area, which adjoins the lounge, professionally hand-painted murals depict the surrounding pastoral countryside. Guests drink their freshly-ground morning coffee and spread cream cheese on their bagels, or enjoy a delightful, expanded continental breakfast beneath hand-cut wooden beams that once supported a nearby 19th-century barn.

Wood from the same barn is used on the room's floor and walls. The inn's gift shop features mid-19th-century windows and is reminiscent of a one-room country cottage.

Adjacent to the Ohio-to-Erie Trail, popular with hikers and bikers, Hearthstone is the only hotel in Cedarville, which is in eastern Greene County about 60 miles northeast of Cincinnati. Home to Cedarville University, a private Christian liberal arts college, the town is the birthplace of U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine. Other well-known native sons include Whitelaw Reid, (Civil War journalist, 1892 vice-presidential candidate on the Harrison-Reid ticket, and U.S. Ambassador), and James H. Kyle, who introduced the bill that established Labor Day as a national holiday in 1893, when he was a U.S. senator from South Dakota.

"This is a hotel with a historical ambiance, in its architectural appearance and with the way it is decorated," said Mr. Zaharek, a Civil War enthusiast who collects memorabilia and participates in battle re-enactments. "When you walk through the front door, you see a building that has the charm and aura of an old inn that has stood here for years." (Managers note: Property decor and breakfast items described in this 2001 article are subject to change)

Though an expanded continental breakfast is served every morning in the dining area, the 12,000-square-foot Hearthstone is designed, according to Mr. Zaharek, as an independent "country inn which blends four-star hotel elegance with a bed-and-breakfast flavor." Each of the hotel's 20 rooms, as with regular "franchise" hotels, has a private bath, and there are two Jacuzzi King Suites. Standard rooms are tastefully appointed

with Thomasville furniture, king- or queen-size beds, ceiling fans, refrigerators, coffeemakers, cable TV, two sinks, and personal amenities from Bath and Body Works.

Wanting to share their love for history, the Zahareks decorated both floors of the inn with display cases containing Civil War relics related to Cedarville and Greene County. On the second-story balcony, which overlooks the sitting lounge and the dining area, exhibits include a Civil War sword and other relics of that time period. In the Heritage Lounge sitting area, an entire display case is dedicated to Whitelaw Reid, who lived in Cedarville as a child and later covered the Civil War for the New York Tribune. Mr. Reid became editor of the newspaper and later served as U.S. ambassador to England and France.

Guests who look closely at the wooden beams over the dining area can see a faded inscription on one that reads: "Built by Tom Wharton 1885."

"We've learned that the oak trees these beams are made from were about 300 years old when they were originally harvested. That means they were likely here before the Pilgrims arrived in the New World," Mr. Zaharek said.

Before moving to Cedarville in 1992, the couple worked at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Mr. Zaharek worked in admissions while Mrs. Zaharek operated the front desks of four residence halls. The Zahareks expect that their core customer base will include parents of college students at Cedarville University as well as other area colleges (including Antioch, Central State, Wilberforce, and Wittenberg), bike trail users, antiquers, tourists visiting Blue Jacket Outdoor Drama, historic Clifton Mill, the village of Yellow Springs, and other Greene County/Miami Valley attractions.

Where: Along the Ohio-to-Erie Trail near downtown Cedarville, about 60 miles northeast of Cincinnati in eastern Greene County. From Cincinnati, take Interstate 71 north to exit 58 (Ohio 72 north), which leads through Jamestown to Cedarville. Driving time: 1½ hours or less.

Nearby attractions: Clifton Mill; Yellow Springs; Young's Jersey Dairy; Ohio-to-Erie Bicycle Trail; National Museum of the U.S. Air Force; Xenia Bike Station, the hub for 40-plus miles of paved multiuse trails in Greene County. Serving Springfield, Xenia, Yellow Springs, Jamestown, South Charleston, Waynesville, and the greater Dayton, Ohio region.

Area Colleges/Universities: Cedarville, Central State, Wilberforce, Antioch, Wittenberg.

For information: Hearthstone Inn & Suites, Toll-Free Reservations 1-877-OHIO-INN (644-6466), Local(937) 766-3000; www.hearthstoneinn.com.