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A legend reborn

Remodeled and downsized, the Black Point Inn returns to its roots

By Peggy Roberts

SCARBOROUGH – Evoking past grandeur and contemporary comfort, the newly reopened Black Point Inn sits, assured and elegant, on Prouts Neck overlooking the ocean.

The last of the area's grand hotels, the inn boasts a spot on the National Registry of Historic Hotels of America, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In its time, it has seen its share of famous people relax on its expansive porch and greet old friends by an inviting fire during Maine's social season.

But, in a day when expansion seems key to survival for many businesses, the inn's new owner, True North Hospitality, chose to downsize the property, returning it to its original footprint, while revamping and updating a number of the remaining spaces. True North consist of 40 investors – all Prouts Neck property owners – who purchased the inn in 2005 from Eric Cianchette, owner of the Portland Regency Hotel.

According to Neil Porta, who manages the inn with his brother and partner, Tim, the decision to eliminate the ballroom and indoor pool, as well as to reduce the number of rooms from 84 to 25, sprang from a desire to restore the inn to a more intimate, less commercial operation. Neil's wife, Janice, said the inn also plans to limit large weddings and other large functions to off-season, maintaining a quiet sanctuary for its guests during the summer season.

With fewer rooms, the inn must rely more heavily on local business in its two restaurants. That could be a problem for a while. Although the inn has enjoyed a prestigious reputation during its 129 years, more recently, its dinner guests were not always complimentary about the food.

But the Portas expect Executive Chef Cheryl Lewis will change all that. Lewis and the inn's food and beverage director, Norine Kotts, familiar to Portland diners for their former restaurants, Café Always and Aurora Provisions, have designed menus around



The Black Point Inn has been welcoming guests for 129 years. Standing on the porch with the ocean in the background are, from left, Executive Chef Cheryl Lewis and inn managing partners Tim Porta and Janice and Neil Porta.

local produce and natural Maine products.

In the inn's more formal restaurant, The Point, the menu changes daily, with such offerings as grilled tuna with chick peas, baby spinach, roasted shitake mushrooms, with a soy, bacon and sherry glaze and Maine lobster risotto with leeks and asparagus

The more casual Chart Room, with jazz piano nightly, offers less formal fare, with Moroccan tangine of mussels with garlic toasts, cod fritters with fried lemon wheels and lobster BLT with applewood smoked bacon, basil aioli and house made chips. Both restaurants are open to the public, The Point for breakfast and dinner and the Chart Room

for lunch and lighter evening fare.

Harvey Rosenfeld, president of the Scarborough Economic Development Corporation, greeted Lewis and Kotts like old friends at a recent cocktail reception at the inn. Rosenfeld said the inn's restructuring should be good for Scarborough and added that he looks forward to dining at the inn and once again having the opportunity to taste Lewis' creations.

"The new people seem committed to maintaining a landmark operation and they have a first class group to run it," Rosenfeld said. "Getting Cheryl (Lewis) involved may encourage more upscale businesses and as people realize there really is a market here, we'll see more of it."

While much of their attention will continue to be on guests from away, the Portas look forward to welcoming many residents of Scarborough and greater Portland to their tables – not a problem for the two brothers who grew up in the welcoming business. Raised on Martha's Vineyard, the two learned the ropes from their family, who purchased a hotel on the island when Neil was 10 years old.

"If you grew up in this business, you knew of the Black Point Inn because it was one of only two or three grand hotels in the area," Neil said.

In 1968, their family bought Migis Lodge, a well-appointed retreat on the shores of Sebago Lake in South Casco.

Tim continues to own and operated the lodge, and also owns The Inn at Ocean's Edge in Camden. For awhile, Neil owned Rock Gardens Inn in Sebasco but sold it to pursue other interests.

Although the brothers have worked together briefly in the past, they look forward to the opportunity to join forces and make the inn a success – for locals as well as out-of-town guests. With its relaxed elegance, welcoming attitude and renowned chef, the Black Point Inn holds promise to do just that.

"We really want to encourage people in the Portland area to come out and try the food. It's fantastic," Neil said.

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