

Osbornes celebrate 35th year with inn

It's a place where even the visitors become family

OCEAN CITY -

On a recent summer morning, voices singing happy birthday floated down to the sidewalk from the wide, sweeping porch of a stately building on the corner of 15th and Wesley Avenue. Under the deep green striped awnings, a crowd was gathered at the Osborne's Fairview Inn to give a special greeting to an employee arriving for a day's work.

At some businesses around town, this would have been an unusual occurrence. However, at Osborne's Inn, this - as well as the comfortable chatter and morning breakfast shared between owners and guests beforehand - is the norm.

It's this familial, welcoming atmosphere that has helped Osborne's Inn become a staple in the Ocean City community. This year marks the inn's 35th anniversary.

"We have the privilege of seeing people on vacation," said Peggy Ann Osborne. "It's our job to make their stay here as special as possible."

Peggy Ann and husband, Frank, are the owners of Osborne Inn. They are familiar faces around the building, along with their grown children, Kelley Osborne Faust, Kevin Osborne, Colleen Mook, Frank Osborne Jr. and Megan Romano, their children's spouses and their 12 grandchildren.

The Osbornes bought the inn on April 1, 1974, and are the building's fourth owners. They wanted to buy the inn so their then four children would have the opportunity to spend summers in Ocean City.

"It was a perfect way to combine a small business and have our family at the shore," said Peggy Ann.

Little did the Osbornes know, this plan would make their family grow by leaps and bounds, and not just with the birth of their fifth child.

At first, renting rooms and raising a family was a tough balance to strike. But once the Osbornes got the hang of things, guests started to become more than just customers. They became friends and, in some cases, just like family.

"Everyone who has come here has become part of our family," said Faust. "It is a familial atmosphere and it represents Ocean City."

Osborne's Inn stays open from Memorial Day to the Indian Summer Block Party in October. There are five rooms and four apartments available for rent, although save for a few openings scattered here and there, the season books up early each year.

About 98 percent of guests return, and Peggy Ann estimates they have about 300 families visit per summer.

"It's just a fun place to be," Peggy Ann said.

Ann Glanville, of Philadelphia, first came to Osborne's Inn in 2002 when a work colleague rented all the rooms. She has been returning with a friend ever since.

"We really wouldn't think of going any place else," said Glanville.

The Wildmans, of Wappinger Falls, N.Y., have made coming to the Osborne's Inn a family affair.

"I've been coming to Ocean City since 1950. We found this place about five years ago and it's perfect," said Marie Wildman. "I just love it."

Marie and her husband, Horatio, rent an apartment at Osborne's Inn. Their son, daughter and their families rent the other apartments.

"This is the best place I've ever stayed, and I've stayed all over," said Greg Herzog.

Herzog visited Osborne's Inn with his wife, Catarina, and son, Logan, 2. They have stayed at the inn for the last decade and normally come three times a season. Herzog's mom, dad and sister stay at Osborne's, too.

"One of the best things about this house is we have a lot of combinations like that," said Peggy Ann.

The building, from the early 1900s, has been updated and refurbished over the years. Most recently, there are new hardwood steps and floors in the living room and dining room with the look of a 100-year-old floor. There are new built-in bookcases and French doors.

"We have the character of 1913 and the amenities of 2008," Peggy Ann said. "We have grown and the house has grown."

In each room, guests will find a "35 Years of Magical Memories" book, detailing the fondest memories and photos of guests staying at

Osborne's Inn since it began. This is another way the Osbornes show the appreciation and importance of their guests.

"You never know when you're going to make a memory," Peggy Ann said with a smile.

In a town where many buildings and homes are torn down every year to make room for bigger and newer structures, Osborne's Inn has been able to remain steadfast on the Ocean City landscape. This, Peggy Ann said, is thanks to their guests. Their guests, of course, say it's thanks to the Osbornes.

"So much in Ocean City has changed over time. There aren't that many places you have that have the stability to stay around," said Romano. "This is a place people call home."

Osborne's "Fairview" Inn is located at 601 East 15th St., Ocean City, and can be reached at (609) 398-4319. Visit the inn online at www.osbornesinn.com. Email Peggy Ann Osborne at peggannocnj@msn.com.

Extended family keeps Osborne inn thriving

By ANN RICHARDSON
Staff Writer

OCEAN CITY - Frank and Peggy Ann Osborne make inn-keeping look easy, but it isn't. Inn-keeping is about creating memories, but that doesn't happen without a lot of effort. The behind the scenes work that goes into running a large, family-oriented inn, what happens day by day, year by year, one guest at a time, is a piece of your heart, they say.

Had so many wonderful memories not been created in the first 25 years the family owned Osborne's Fairview Inn, the inn might not have survived the real estate boom to celebrate its 35th anniversary this year at 35th and Wesley. At the peak of the real estate boom, the property would have fetched a tidy sum, enough for Frank and Peggy Ann to head south, blissfully secure in retirement. But the couple never entertained an offer. The old inn is about family, their five children, assorted spouses, 12 grandchildren and the more than 300 people who come in and out each summer. They hope the inn survives forever.

"Our children vowed if we ever considered it, they'd lock hands and stand in the way of the bulldozer," said Peggy Ann. "This is our life. This is what it's about."

Peggy Ann's parents owned a home at 15th and West. She grew up on the beach and when she married Frank, he joined her. Every summer, she continued the Ocean City tradition at her parent's home. Along came, in rapid succession, their children.

"I said to Frank, we need to get a place of our own," said Peggy Ann.

The couple went house-hunting, but found nothing suitable in their price range. Driving by the big, old brown building that they now call home, she noticed a for-sale sign.

"I told the Realtor, I want to see it," Peggy Ann said. "He was sure it was out of our price range or a dump, but he acquiesced."

They sat at the old Carey's Real Estate building a stone's throw from what would soon be their home.

"It was a stretch, but it was doable," said Peggy Ann.

The old house oozed charm, with built-in bookcases, French doors and a fireplace.

Buying the home, however, meant renting out rooms to pay a new mortgage. Peggy Ann was a school teacher in Philadelphia, the mother of five children under the age of 8 had a full-time summer job. Frank worked full time in the city and was available only on weekends.

"I was so wired, I had no idea what I was doing, it's just a big blur," she said. "I just did it. There was no choice."

The couple fixed the house, three apartments, a cottage, and five guest rooms. The children slept in one big room with bunk beds, and Frank and Peggy Ann had a room.

"If anyone complained, I reminded them it was the only way we could live at the beach," Peggy Ann joked.

"Looking back, the children drove me crazy and the guests kept me sane," she added. "The guests were polite, they pretty much cleaned up after themselves. They paid me, thanked me and gave me candy. The guests were affirming for me. Hey, I love my children, but when they were little I needed those guests."

Colleen Osborne Romano said the bunk room served a purpose.

"It was very tight quarters, but this business brought us closer together," she said. "We got to know all the families that came here. People watched us grow up. It was like one big family every summer. My siblings and I are very close. It was from growing up in that room, in this house, together."

"The rule was that they better be nice to the guests," said Peggy Ann.

The home was built in 1913 as a home for a family named Munger.

"They lost the property in the depression, it went to the bank," said Frank.

Peggy Ann later met Kitty Munger Steel, who shared old pictures and memories.

"She was born in a bedroom upstairs," Peggy Ann said.

There were two more owners until the property was sold to the Osbornes in 1973.

Camilla D'Annunzio has been a regular visitor since 1980.

"We could go anywhere, stay anywhere," she said, "but the Osborne family is the draw. I stumbled on it one day, I saw Peggy Ann with all these little children on the steps, and I thought that's my kind of woman."

"Peggy Ann is a woman of faith, she has lots to share, lots to give," D'Annunzio added. "This is a retreat. It's a sanctuary, a place of peace. I'm a nurse, so it's a respite. I let go. I relax. I get refreshed, renewed."

Peggy Ann said some ask if the inn is a bed and breakfast, or B&B.

"I say no, it's a B and C, bed and coffee," she said. "The first up in the morning makes the coffee. Honestly, I couldn't do breakfast. Make me cook and I'm miserable, no one would want to come. That would be a losing business plan."

What they have works, with 98 percent of guests returning, according to Peggy Ann.

"Why fix what isn't broken?" she said.

The Osborne children have benefited from the inn-keeping experience, in ways Peggy Ann says she never dreamed of.

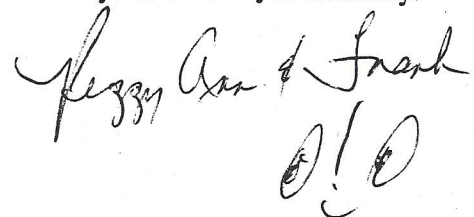
"They're all successful," she said. "They all went to college, they traveled. We did all the right things. If you ask them, they will tell you that it is this house that helped them achieve success. They would sit on that porch with so many different, interesting people all through the years, doctors, lawyers, corporate executives, strip miners, plumbers, teachers, pilots, you name it. Think about what they were exposed to, what they learned."

They also all worked at the inn, each starting as the "gopher."

To Our Wonderful Friends:

A Big Thank You!!

What a Gift you have been in our lives! I once read that "each of us is but a total of the many folks we've met on our Journey through life". To you receiving this message, that is so true. Whether you are a recent Guest or an "Oldtimer", you have helped to shape the lives of all in the Frank and Peggy Ann Osborne Family. We thank you sincerely.



Peggy Ann and Frank

"It certainly taught them how to be of service, how to please, to take care of someone else's needs," said Peggy Ann.

The inn has hosted newlyweds, and sadly, more than a few in their dying days.

"We had a man come and stay in the cottage, he was dying, he wanted to be at the beach," Peggy Ann said. "He was a teacher and an artist, he sat outside and painted and listened to opera. I felt so blessed, I said thank you God for this blessing, to be able to provide some peace for him."

She called the customers "the salt of the Earth."

"They're all nice people," said Peggy Ann. "They're down home people, nice families. They come with their bikes, they don't even

use their cars. They love being in Ocean City."

Frank said Peggy Ann deserves all the credit for making the family business a success.

"She did it all," he said. "I worked in the city, this was all her. People come here just to spend time with my wife. She's a natural at this, a magnet, they all love her."

Peggy Ann said the house has brought her family and her customers together in many ways.

"This is my little corner of the world," she said. "There is so much pain out there and this is such a healing place, such a blessing."

"I get tired, but it's a good tired," she added.