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18th century tavern welcomes 21st century guests

Rose Tree Tavern opens doors as Brandywine Conference and Visitors Bureau

On May 29, 1739, David Calvert presented a petition to the courts, requesting a liquor license for a “convenient house” he was building on the “Great Road” that leads from Chester.

That “convenient house” – the Rose Tree Tavern -- once again offers “travelers a rest from the road” now that the building houses the Brandywine Conference and Visitors Bureau (BCVB).

With new “innkeepers” in the form of the BCVB staff, the renovated Rose Tree Tavern once again provides a landmark for travelers, and a rest stop for the weary at the well-traveled crossroads in Upper Providence.

Delaware County Council joined with the BCVB staff and board members, members of the Delaware County Parks and Recreation staff and board and Upper Providence township council in celebrating the reopening of the historic Rose Tree Tavern on Thursday, May 26, in Rose Tree Park.

“We are pleased to open this historic building once again, to offer Delaware County-style hospitality to our residents and visitors,” said County Council Chairman Jack Whelan. “If these walls could talk, I’m sure we would hear fascinating stories of local political squabbles, debates over the sale of liquor, and the horseback adventures of fox hunters.”

“We’ve accomplished several goals with the Rose Tree Tavern. We’ve preserved a rich part of County history, we’ve recycled a 200-year-old building and modernized it with energy-efficient amenities, and we’ve added an asset and resource to our County park system that all of our residents can enjoy.”

The Rose Tree Tavern renovation was years in the making and countless motorists have watched the project as they drove through the intersection. The tavern was purchased by Delaware County in 1967 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In August, 2004, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation paid for the relocation of the tavern, 200 feet back from the road, as the first step in a redesign of the crossroads.

Last summer, County Council awarded five prime contracts to cover the renovation, from design and electrical work to plumbing and fire protection. The \$1.7 million renovation was funded through the 3 percent hotel occupancy tax, which funds the BCVB.

Public Works Director Dennis Carey said the renovation of the building retained as much of the original structure as possible, including the fieldstone walls and fireplaces, one framed with tiles that depict a stag hunt. However, the building now has a geothermal mechanical system, energy-efficient lighting, an internal sprinkler system and handicapped accessibility.

(more)

(Rose Tree Tavern continued)

Other improvements include a paved walkway on the perimeter of the property on Rose Tree and Providence roads.

There is a 1739 datestone on the western gable of the building, but that is likely from an earlier building. The original frame building from 1739 became dilapidated and was torn down and replaced with a fieldstone building in 1809, followed by another stone addition in 1836.

As part of the opening ceremony, a Colonial-garbed Maury Hutelmyer of Springfield provided a brief history of the Rose Tree Tavern. Hutelmyer is volunteer coordinator of the Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation, a living history museum that recreates a working 18th century farm in nearby Ridley Creek State Park.

Hutelmyer explained that 700 acres of land in Providence Township (what is now Upper Providence) was given by William Penn to John Calvert in 1683. Records show a long list of sales and various owners through the years including Moses Palmer, Isaac Cochran, George Cummins and George Darlington.

It was David Calvert who applied for a liquor license and secured one upon his third request in 1739. He petitioned the governor to open a “publick house of entertainment for the selling of wine, brandy, rum, beer, syder and other strong liquors.” The tavern was originally called “Three Thons” in 1770, and “Red Lion” in 1802. In 1805, Moses Palmer changed the name to “Rose Tree Tavern,” trying to overcome a negative reputation gained by the “Red Lion.”

In 1835, a Delaware County temperance society was organized and the tavern served as a temperance house. In 1837, according to records, the house was licensed to the organizers of the Rose Tree Fox Hunting Club.

In 1922, the farm was sold to Charles Leedom. It was his wife who conveyed the premises to the Delaware County commissioners in 1967.

“What’s amazing is how this building has survived for decades, and now it is revitalized to serve in many of the same capacities it was originally intended – for hospitality,” Hutelmyer said.

“These taverns were located at intersections on popular routes and offered a convenient place to stop, rest the horses, get a meal and libation, and catch up on the local news of the day,” Hutelmyer said.

The Rose Tree Tavern now serves as the headquarters of the Brandywine Conference and Visitors Bureau (BCVB), providing County residents and visitors with information on the County’s historical, cultural and recreational resources.

BCVB Director Tore Fiore said the Visitors Bureau will be open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

“This move puts us right in the center of Delaware County where we can be a resource for everyone,” Fiore said. “That will give us the capability to be open in the evenings during the Rose Tree Summer Festival, as well as for other significant events in Rose Tree Park during the year.”

During the Delaware County Summer Festival, which runs Wednesdays through Sundays, June 15 to Aug. 14, the BCVB will be open from 5 to 7 p.m. Brochures for the Summer Festival are available there as well as the Park Office in the Leedom House, also in Rose Tree Park.

Fiore said the Chadds Ford office of the BCVB will continue to house the Mickey Vernon Delaware County Athletes Hall of Fame and will be staffed by volunteers 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday through Friday.



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Caption: Delaware County Council Chairman Jack Whelan (center) was greeted at the door of the historic Rose Tree Tavern by Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation volunteers Janis Kephart of Upper Providence and Maury Hutelmyer of Springfield. The Rose Tree Tavern reopened its doors Thursday, May 26, as the new headquarters for the Brandywine Conference and Visitors Bureau, where Kephart also works as an administrative assistant. The Bureau's Tavern office is now open to the public 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday in Rose Tree Park.