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News

Valley Inn Is Getting New Owner, Addition

by Michael Ruby

One of the last vestiges of a bygone time peopled by such notables as F. Scott Fitzgerald and H.L. Mencken soon may be changing hands. The historic Valley Inn, located at 10501 Falls Road in Brooklandville, is being sold by family members who have owned and operated the landmark eatery since 1922.

Owners John A. "Bud" Hatfield, Jr. and his sister, Elizabeth Proutt, are negotiating the sale of the restaurant to Theodore W. Bauer, owner of the Oregon Grille in Hunt Valley, according to documents filed with the Baltimore County liquor board.

A hearing on transferring the Valley Inn's liquor license from the Hatfield family to TVI (Md.), LLC, a corporation whose sole member is Bauer, is slated for December 20, according to a posting at The Valley Inn of the proposed action. The required notice is the first public indication that a change is coming to the establishment that had served for generations as the gateway to the valleys area.

Still talking

Usually, the transfer of a liquor license is one of the final steps in any restaurant sales transaction. But Bud Hatfield, who grew up in the building's second-story family quarters and has been a daily fixture at The Valley Inn nearly his whole life, claims the parties are still talking.

"Nothing's a done deal," said Hatfield. He refused to comment further.

Also, The Oregon Grille's Bauer declined to comment, saying only it is "premature to say anything."

However, on the liquor license transfer application, Fedhill LLC is listed as the owner of The Valley Inn premises and gives the same address for the corporation as The Oregon Grille on Shawan Road. No information about Fedhill was available through Maryland business records.

And other area restaurateurs, relying on the industry's grapevine, say a deal was reached "two or three weeks ago," said one source who asked to

remain anonymous. That would put the hand shake between the Hatfield family and Bauer around mid-November. Around the same time, TVI (Md.) LLC articles of incorporation were created on Nov. 16, 2010, and the request for the liquor license transfer was filed on November 19, according to documents included in the liquor board file.

The place to go

In its heyday during the 1920s, The Valley Inn was the place to go for the hunting parties held after the area's timber races and also was the site of

dog races, polo matches and even cock fights. Besides Fitzgerald and Mencken, other luminaries who dined or drank there included Blackjack Bouvier, father of

Jacqueline Kennedy. During Prohibition, the inn ostensibly became a tearoom though patrons allegedly provided their own libation of choice.

Over the years, The Valley Inn has changed little which is just fine with the regulars who have been dining there for decades. Predictably, the menu forecasts the seasons with shad roe and bacon in the spring, soft crabs and crab imperial in the summer, fried chicken or liver and onions in the fall and padded oysters in the winter. Its signature crab cakes are served year round.

In previously published interviews, Bud Hatfield said he did not advertise the Valley Inn because he didn't want to create a commercial atmosphere. "People come here and they don't want to be bothered," he said.

Today, The Valley Inn is known as a retreat into a place that time forgot with its equestrian artwork, paneled walls and numerous fireplaces. Former Baltimore County historian John McGrain once wryly quipped that the best thing about The Valley Inn was its survivability.

Local landmark status

In addition to the alcohol dispensing permit, Bauer is seeking permission for an increase in the premises, though no floor plan has yet been submitted to liquor board officials. A floor plan must be provided to the three-panel

**"Nothing's
a done deal."**

-John A. "Bud" Hatfield

commission by the Dec. 20 hearing date, according to liquor board administrators.

Built in 1832, The Valley Inn structure is included on the Baltimore County final landmarks list, protecting it from demolition, neglect or any exterior changes without permission from the local Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). Also, the structure was listed in 1977 on the National Register of Historic Places, making it eligible for federal matching grants-in-aid for historic preservation.

Because The Valley Inn has enjoyed local landmark status since 2001, any additions or changes to the structure's exterior must be submitted to and approved by the all-volunteer LPC. But as yet nothing has been submitted to the commission for consideration at its next regularly scheduled monthly meeting in January, according to Karin Brown, chief of preservation services for Baltimore County's Office of Planning.

"It will have to come before the

commission," said Brown, referring to the proposed increase in premises.

Items can still be placed on the LPC's January 13 agenda up to two weeks before the meeting, said Brown. But, she cautions, sufficient time must be allowed for a technical committee to visit the site before the matter can

be brought before the full commission.

"We can't determine the appropriateness of the addition without looking at the site," said Brown.

'A special place'

The property also is subject to covenants with the Valleys Planning

Council (VPC) entered into during the 2000 comprehensive zoning review process when a commercial classification was requested and received by the Hatfield family.

In exchange for the business zoning, the Hatfields agreed to place the structure on the landmarks list and abide by local historic preservation

"The Valley Inn is a special place. I'm optimistic it will go well."

--Teresa Moore

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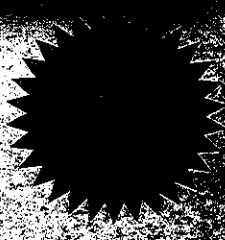
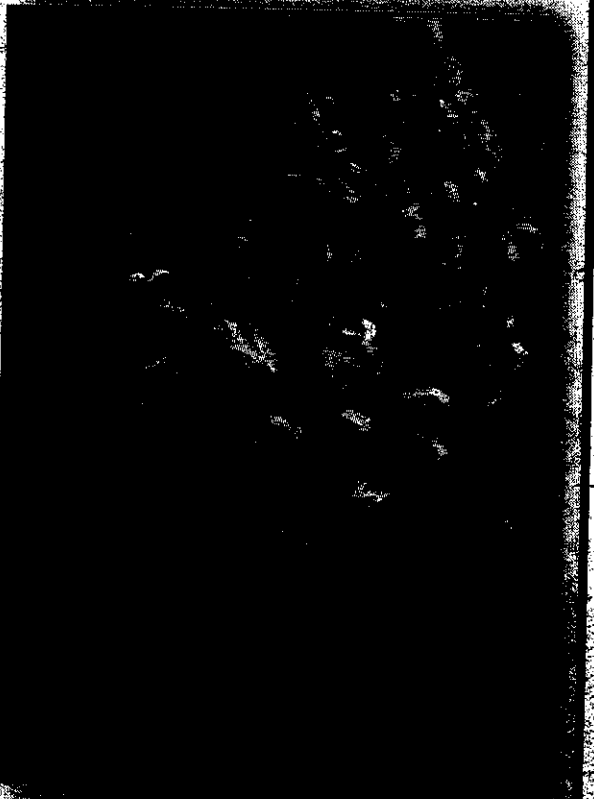
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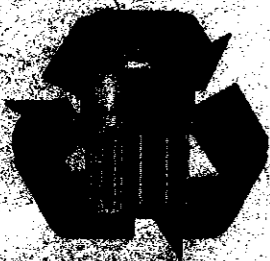


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Valley
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News

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guidelines. The commercial classification was placed on only that portion of the overall 9+ acre parcel that contains the actual restaurant building.

The agreement with the VPC, an umbrella organization charged with maintaining the rural integrity of the valleys' area, does allow for a small addition, according to Teresa Moore, the organization's executive director. It also allows the residentially-zoned parking lot to service the eatery, she added.

However, since she did not know about the new ownership so she could not say how the group will respond to the proposed changes. Her board of directors will be discussing the issue at a Dec. 7 meeting, she said.

"It's hard to tell without seeing the details," said Moore. "The Valley Inn is a special place. I'm optimistic it will go well."

Few neighbors

The VPC has had a sometimes con-

tentious relationship with Bauer and the Oregon Grille. The organization successfully has battled his plans to hold outdoor catered events, such as wedding receptions, at the facility located just north of Oregon Ridge Park. The group has convinced county zoning officials that the traffic and noise generated by such events would be detrimental to the surrounding rural countryside.

But Moore acknowledges that Bauer did a wonderful restoration of the former Oregon Ridge general store when he converted it into the restaurant and she says she expects he will bring the same attention to detail to The Valley Inn that has made The Oregon Grille a destination spot for fine dining.

Besides, added Moore, The Valley Inn, which is bordered by the JFX interstate roadway to the east, an SHA salt storage facility to the north and a church to the south, has few neighbors that could be affected by any changes.

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Horse country gateway

The construction of the Baltimore Beltway and the JFX portion of I-83 in the 1950s jolted The Valley Inn out of its rural isolation and lost its distinction as the gateway into the verdant horse country region of Baltimore County. About nine acres of the property was taken for the interstate roadway.

The land was first surveyed in 1693 and at one time was owned by Mary Carroll Caton, daughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and owner of the Brooklandwood estate located north on Falls Road which is now the home for the St. Paul's Schools for Boys and Girls.

The stone structure was constructed in 1832 by John R. Gwynn at the confluence of the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad, then a horse-drawn convenience, and Falls Road which was a privately-operated turnpike with a good surface that drew farmers and herders to the Baltimore

market, according to a write-up by John McGrain of the area's history. The basement of the so-called Brooklandville House was the kitchen with a large cooking fireplace. In a savvy marketing move, the tavern portion of the house faced the travelers on Falls Road.

The structure at various times served as the first post office for Brooklandville, a branch of Abercrombie & Fitch and other commercial uses. But it was vacant and boarded up by the time of The Great War and unused until 1922 when it was reopened by Capt. John Hatfield, a St. Louis native who had been stationed at Fort Holabird during the war. Hatfield returned to Baltimore to marry a girl he met here and changed the name of the establishment to The Valley Inn.

Capt. Hatfield died in 1965 when his son, Bud, and daughters Mary Lou and Elizabeth (known as Bonnie) inherited the property. They added a small addition in the late 1960s and have operated the eatery since.

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