



THE CARRIAGE INN / 520 EAST STATE STREET – KNOX PA. (814) 797-1506

Let's roll the spotlight on to the CARRIAGE INN for the October Mayor's Business Feature. The CARRIAGE INN is a Knox STAPLE, another one of our great legacy businesses. It's actually a triple entity serving as a Hotel, Restaurant & Tavern. We all LOVE the CARRIAGE INN in Knox Pa!

The history begins with the "Knox Community Club" in the 1930's. The club wanted to bring social & industrial expansion to town and in 1939 asked Knox Glass Incorporated President Roy Underwood if he would bring his corporate offices to Knox. Mr Underwood responded: "It would be impossible to bring such a large organization to Knox because of the lack of facilities to accommodate the traffic that would follow the movement." He added, "Modern hotel facilities in town would do a great deal to influence bringing the Knox Glass Incorporated offices to Knox."

After many more months of planning, talking, bickering & dickering (as the story is written) the Knox faithful began a campaign began to raise the necessary funds. Stock shares were sold to 422 people and \$42,000 was raised for the project. In January 1940, construction began driven totally from the grass roots effort of the faithful who believed in Knox and had confidence in the stability and determination of its people. I would mention here, while this new hotel was originally named "HOTEL UNDERWOOD" in honor of the great Knox Glass founder, it's a myth that Mr. Underwood built & owned it. The original deed clearly shows a consortium of stockholder ownership.

On Wednesday MAY 28th, 1941 a dedication was held for the new "HOTEL UNDERWOOD" and two days later it opened for business. The dedication was a gala affair attended by some 300 stockholders and many more guests who came early to give the building a thorough inspection. Mr. R.T. Laing, Principal of Knox Schools, acted as the master of ceremonies. Following dinner, Mr. Underwood took charge of the dedicatory services and expressed his gratitude to the civic leaders of Knox for their untiring efforts

getting this hotel complex built. The members of the board of directors were then introduced as follows: Harold Berlin, R.T. Laing, E.E. Slicker, George Berlin, L.H. Bowser, & W.N. Perkins. Clarion County Judge Harry Rimer extended his congratulations from all of Clarion County. Dr I.D. Kahle (local physician and former State Senator) introduced many other dignitaries including the hotel architect Russell Howard from DuBois. The keynote speaker of the evening was C.R. Wilson, manager of The Roosevelt Hotel (Pittsburgh) who was very complimentary when speaking of the Hotel Underwood and stated frankly that very few towns the size of Knox could boast of so fine a hostelry. He went on to compliment the new Hotel Underwood manager A.L. Page for the manner in which he handled the banquet.

It should be noted that Mr. Underwood did follow through then in moving the Knox Glass Corporation offices to Knox, remodeling an existing building on East Penn Avenue that became known as the "KGI" (Knox Glass Incorporated) Building. Roy Underwood tragically died less than a decade later from injuries he received in a traffic accident on October 16th, 1951 up at the intersection in Frills Corners Pa.

The "HOTEL UNDERWOOD" featured a bowling alley in the basement, 16 guest rooms, a large dining room, a cocktail lounge and a coffee shop. My mother worked in that coffee shop back in those early days, which was actually located where the present-day cocktail lounge is now. The original cocktail lounge was over on the other front (right) side of the building in what they now call the "HUNT ROOM." At some point in this early period the coffee shop was scrapped and the cocktail lounge was moved to its present-day location.

In 1959 the "HOTEL UNDERWOOD" was sold to Chuck Montgomery from Grove City who changed the name of the business to "THE CARRIAGE INN." Chuck operated the business for only two years and in 1961 the CARRIAGE INN was sold to the REED Family, also from Grove City. I actually found a newspaper ad announcing the "Grand Opening" the Reed Family had on Friday, July 28th, 1961. The ad noted: "Under the New Management of Mrs. James Reed and Sons." The "Sons" of Mrs. James Reed were Jim, Bob & Tom. They all moved to Knox to run the business with Tom and mother (Nell) living in the upstairs guest rooms. This began the longest ownership era the Carriage Inn has had to date.

The Reed ownership era was very successful but Nancy Reed tells me they went through a slow startup period. It took awhile to get things going well and Tom didn't stay with the operation long. It really became the business of the two Reed couples Jim & Martha / Bob & Nancy. On Fridays they started offering the first fish dinners in the area featuring Haddock Fish at \$1.50 per plate with all the trimmings. This caught on and soon their fish dinners became legendary. Nancy tells me this really stabilized them in the early days and soon things really took off. Pizza Pizza Pizza! If you wanted Pizza in Knox back in those days, it was Carriage Inn Pizza! Those pizzas became legendary, everyone LOVED them! I'm told Vi Nelson would stay up all night making pizza sauce, salad dressings and many other items they offered in the restaurant. Everyone remembers Vi and her pizza. Yum Yum Triple YUM!

It was a total family effort running the hotel. Everyone chipped in all areas with all four of them putting in many hours of hard work daily. Bob & Jim tended the bar, Martha was the morning cook and both Nancy & Martha waited tables, Nancy worked more in the afternoon and evenings. She tells me there was never a shortage of chores at hand running the hotel. During hunting season they actually put cots in the private dining room to accommodate all the hunters, thus naming the room the "HUNT ROOM" as it is today. I can remember as a kid, the bathroom was down the steps in the basement. It was a fun place for us kids. Everyone went there after games. The Carriage Inn was the place to go for everyone, and it still is today....

The REED family ownership era went on from 1961 until 1987. For brief periods there were two other operators who took over the establishment, but the Reed family ended up selling it to Denny & Kay Zerbe in 1987. After some repairs and new equipment, the Zerbe family held their grand opening on May 2nd, 1988 and with some hard work, the hotel took off well again with the Zerbe family at the helm. Patrons were happy to see the business flourishing again. Rick Zerbe served as the manager and sister Linda was in the kitchen cooking. Amanda was young in those years helping out where she could. Again, it was an entire family effort. The Zerbe family ownership continued until current owners Jeffrey "Woody" McCleary & Amanda "Mandy" Zerbe purchased the complex in 2007.

On March 12th, 2007 Woody & Amanda began operations as owners of the Carriage Inn and began a massive renovation on the entire complex. The Carriage Inn is in fine shape these days. The place is running well & looking great, every area of the complex has seen complete renovation from top to bottom. Woody & Amanda have worked very hard in this effort and wish to credit both sides of their families for the help and support they have received along the way. Amanda's father DENNY ZERBE has since passed away, but her mother KAY is in there daily helping Amanda out. Woody's father STAN McCLEARY, and partner SUZIE SWIFT both put in many hours there during the renovation process & Stan continues daily doing chores at the Carriage. Also, TRUDI HURRELBRINK has been working there now for some 23 years, a long time faithful employee they are blessed to have onboard.

Amanda Zerbe has worked at the Carriage since she was nine. Today, she puts in endless hours daily cooking everything on site. All menu items are made from scratch. It's Triple YUM stuff at the CARRIAGE INN – breakfast, lunch or dinner. Many groups have their gatherings, reunions etc. at the Carriage Inn. There's a private dining area (Hunt Room) as well as the main dining room. All of the staples are still on their daily menu specials. Some of my favorites include Chicken & Biscuits (Monday) Spaghetti & Lasagna (Thursday) and Fish on Fridays. Great wings on Wednesdays, Pizzas anytime, Salads & Pies galore....Hot Roast Beef Sandwich....It's ALL good, & it's ALL at the CARRIAGE INN in KNOX Pa!

Knox is fortunate to have this fine business in our town going strong as ever with Woody & Amanda at the helm. We all say THANKS to the CARRIAGE INN for being one of the great landmark KNOX businesses. LONG LIVE the CARRIAGE INN!