



Bringing Back a Grand Old Lady –

The Bedford Springs Resort

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“**T**he great spring is alive and well, just like Bedford Springs Resort.” That exciting statement comes from Todd Gillespie, sales and marketing director for Benchmark Hospitality, the management company overseeing the landmark resort/hotel’s restoration. The Bedford, Pennsylvania property has hosted guests ranging from honeymooners to United States presidents. And like the phoenix that rose from the ashes in ancient Egypt, Bedford Springs Resort is building on a storied past to become an even more successful destination site when it reopens during the summer of 2007.

Bedford Spring’s reputation as a hospitality center has its origins in Native Americans who gathered around seven natural springs that provided curative powers and nourishment. By the time Europeans discovered the springs in the late Eighteenth Century, it was reported to be a meeting ground for Indian tribes who gathered peacefully to take the waters, temporarily ending feuds. According to Todd Gillespie, “The first permanent dwelling on the site was the Stone House built in 1805.” The house was constructed near the Sweet Spring. Over the years additional buildings were added to the complex which acquired the name Bedford Springs Hotel. Facilities were established at Bedford Springs and expanded over the decades.

Bedford Springs grew to be a regional attraction in the Nineteenth Century as vacationers sometimes pitched tents in close proximity to the waters. Tents became less conspicuous as time passed and additional permanent

facilities were added. Rail passenger service, offered by the Baltimore and Ohio and Pennsylvania Railroads, meant that guests arrived from a variety of metropolitan centers, causing the hotel to increase its hospitality offerings.

As the resort’s reputation grew, it began to attract noteworthy visitors including United States Presidents Harrison, Tyler, Polk, and Buchanan. The chief executive most closely associated with Bedford Springs is Pennsylvania native James Buchanan, who spent 40 summers at the hotel including the years of his presidency. Affairs of state were informally moved from Washington D.C. to Bedford Springs during the summers of 1857-1861 when the resort served as the summer White House. The United States Supreme Court justices also met there in an extremely rare informal session to discuss a run away slave case prior to the Civil War. Rooms are currently being designated to honor famous guests who lodged at Bedford Springs.

In more recent times the guest list at Bedford Springs was influenced by events surrounding World War II. Japanese diplomats were temporarily interred there from 1943-45. U.S. Government officials were aware of the prevailing anti-Japanese sentiment so they made it known that the diplomats were not permitted to golf, drink alcoholic beverages, or enjoy hotel food and other amenities. Government supplied food from Washington D.C. was their standard dining fare. Approximately 7,000 U.S. military personnel were also trained in radio communications at the facility during the war.



Following World War II the grand hotel era in America began a gradual decline. “Taking the waters” as a prescription for various medical maladies did not fit with the times or scientific evidence. Gone were the days when physicians would prescribe the “Bedford Cure,” a three week health regimen at the hotel. The Sweet Spring near to the hotel was capped in 1955, thus metaphorically closing the golden era of Bedford Springs. Even Hygea, the Goddess of Health, whose likeness appeared as a statue on the front lawn to welcome guests, disappeared. The facility remained open but continued to decline until 1986 when the doors were closed for the final time. Fortunately, the hotel’s structures remained intact, offering tourists and history buffs a glimpse of the glory days.

Bedford Springs architectural style is eclectic, reflecting a variety of influences between the years 1805-1905. The structures are arranged in a contiguous setting. Near the center is a Greek Revival style colonial building (1826-1842) complete with a brick façade, two story colonnade, and portico. North of the colonial building are four frame, log, and stone structures: the Evitt House, the Stone House, the Swiss Cottage, and the Anderson House. To the South are brick buildings including one accommodating the first indoor swimming pool, and new construction for a luxury spa.

Benchmark Hospitality understands and appreciates the hotel’s historical significance. “This is a restoration, not a renovation,” states Todd Gillespie. In keeping with the character of the hotel, all significant features that are deemed to be safe are receiving careful attention from craftsmen. The hotel will be returned to the way it looked in 1905.

Construction already underway provides a preview of the colonial building that will be the location of a new grand entrance, complete with portraits of important early visitors. To create a more serene setting for the entrance and a more efficient flow of vehicle traffic, the current highway passing in front of the hotel is being relocated to the rear of the complex.

The Evitt building will showcase a library featuring guest ledger books signed by famous visitors. A nearby Crystal Room will seat 130 dining guests in addition to offering two private dining rooms. Complete dining facilities will be centered in three tiers in the Stone Building. One tier, called Defibaugh’s Tavern, will offer guests relaxing views of the gardens and Shobers Run Creek. Twelve Pennsylvania draft beers will be offered to connoisseurs, along with sandwiches and light fare.

The indoor swimming pool restoration includes polishing the original white tiles and refurbishing a balcony overlooking the water surface. Other more personal effects found throughout the hotel, like the etched markings on window glass, are also being kept. According to Mr. Gillespie, brides “tested” wedding diamonds by etching their signatures on the glass windows during their reception in the ballroom. And because Bedford Springs was a honeymoon

destination site, many of the windows were marked over the years as the tradition grew.

Not all plans required restoration, however, as construction of a new 30,000 square foot, world class spa and 93 guestrooms and suites is underway. A full range of treatments will be offered around the spa that will be fed by water from seven nearby springs. A fitness room, full service salon, and retail shops will round out the featured offerings.

Todd Gillespie explains that while the property is historically significant, it will not be based solely in the past. "Bedford Springs will be as high tech as any resort in the world, a totally wireless facility." Seventy percent of the guest rooms will offer king sized beds, and in the remaining rooms twin sized accommodations are planned. Rooms will also showcase an armoire, flat screen TV's, a business desk, Water Works water fixtures, and a sun filled deck complete with two rocking chairs. The renovation will result in a "world class, four star luxury hotel. Bedford Springs will become a major destination for both leisure and business travelers," said Mr. Gillespie. Pittsburgh, Washington, and Baltimore are within a two hour drive of Bedford, Pennsylvania, which is located along the Pennsylvania Turnpike. "Location is one of our greatest advantages."

A first class resort would not be possible without a similarly rated golf course. And like the Bedford Springs Hotel, the golf course has a rich history. First designed

by the legendary golf architect Spencer Oldham in the mid 1890's, the course underwent two significant changes when it was converted to a nine hole by A.W. Tillenham course and later brought back to an 18 hole facility by golf architect Donald Ross. The last major course design occurred in 1923.

Over the years Shobers Run Creek, which runs directly through the course, suffered from sediment filling in the margins and waterways. According to Mr. Gillespie, construction is on schedule with the purpose of returning the course to the original 1923 Donald Ross design. Contractor for the project is Frontier Construction of Jones Mills, Pennsylvania, working with Force Design. "Force Design is the preeminent restorer of historical golf courses," states Mr. Gillespie.

The Bedford Springs Resort renaissance was initiated when Mark Langdale and Keith Evans, principal owners in the project, announced in 2005 that the resort would be reopened in 2007 at a cost of about \$100 million. Mark Langdale is a friend of President George Bush and currently U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica. Benchmark Hospitality International is an independent hospitality management company based in The Woodlands, Texas. The company also operates resorts, conference centers, hotels and condotels both domestically and internationally. Construction is on schedule and a Memorial Day, 2007, grand opening is anticipated. On that day, the goddess Hygea will reclaim her position on the front lawn welcoming guests to the grand resort known as Bedford Springs.



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