

Peddlers & Paddlers sees surge in visitors

Peddlers & Paddlers Inn started 2020 with high expectations and a burgeoning guest book. Owners Emily Aubele and Tammy Dulaney said bookings in January and February of 2020 topped those from 2019 by approximately 300%.

But then the tentacles of a global pandemic started to reach into Venango County, and the Franklin bed and breakfast saw the cancellations start to pour in.

That's when Aubele and Dulaney received a request from UPMC Northwest about hosting nurses and doctors who were traveling to the area to work at the Seneca hospital, helping to treat the growing number of COVID patients there.

"We closed our reservations to any non-essential travelers," said Aubele.

When the county moved into the governor's "yellow phase" in May, the bed and breakfast was closed for a week so workers could do a thorough cleaning of the property before reopening to what became a busy summer and fall season, Aubele said.

Three part-time workers were added to the staff to help with housekeeping and the bed and breakfast's new weekday breakfast service.

Aubele said, despite the pandemic, the inn doubled its occupancy over last year, and was on track to triple it when more health safety guidelines came out in November. As a result, holiday reservations throughout November and December were canceled, "and rightly so," said Aubele.

"Without a doubt, the pandemic hit hard the first of the year. May through October



Besides overnight accommodations and a meal in the morning, Peddlers & Paddlers Inn is adding more items and hours of operation to its Shack Out Back, a shop that offers "antique and unique" gift items and collectibles.

improved significantly, but bookings were often very last minute," Aubele said.

She said the inn's location with nearby rivers and trails served it well with many first-time visitors.

"They were here to enjoy a new-found love of outdoor recreation," Aubele said. "We saw lots more first-time bike trail uses, kayakers and canoers, and folks just looking to enjoy the local trails," she said.

Aubele and Dulaney strive to point their guests to the many charming businesses in Franklin and surrounding areas.

"We always promote local businesses and restaurants, and this year there was an additional push to do so," Aubele said.

The inn owners participated in several programs conducted by the Franklin Retail Association.

They donated to fundraises and other regional awareness campaigns. "We did everything we could to promote the area and safe recreational pursuits," said Aubele.

"Over and over again, we were able to tell the story of regional resiliency — how this entire region came together to help each other succeed under the most unusual and dire of circumstances," she said.

Remaining optimistic, Aubele said she is confident that the inn will maintain or exceed 2020 occupancy rates this year due predominantly to the good experiences folks



Peddlers & Paddlers received a special license last year that allows it to offer in-house catering.

had during their first visit to the area.

There are some improvement projects on the agenda for 2021, Aubele said.



Katey Grindle, Rebecca Ackaoui Anderson, Michael Onorato, Amy Cottrill and Annikah Cottrill, all from the Pittsburgh area, enjoyed some breakfast and a few laughs before heading out on the river with the local OARS group. These guests at Peddlers & Paddlers were first-time visitors to Franklin.

She noted the inn will be expanded to improve its outdoor seating capacity. There also will be some upgrades to the HVAC system.

Aubele and Dulaney also plan to expand the hours and offerings of their "antique and uniques" shop, the Shack Out Back.

The bed and breakfast received its license to offer in-house catering.

This will permit the inn to provide "seamless services" to people who want to host events at the inn, Aubele said.

"We are also planning to offer opportunities for individuals to schedule breakfast meetings, and we will be offering trail lunches for those who would like to take a lunch or breakfast on a hiking or biking trip," she said.

DeBence museum receives clock, limits tours due to pandemic

This article was submitted by the museum.

The Oil Region Music Preservation, doing business as DeBence Antique Music World, is located in downtown Franklin at 1261 Liberty St.

Though tours of the over 100 mechanical music machines were limited by the COVID-19 shutdowns, as mandated by the governor, the museum is still a functioning non-profit.

School tours were canceled, as were many of the museum's Sunday Mini Events in 2020, so attendance numbers for the year were fewer than half of a normal year.

When the shutdown was ordered in April, budget projections indicated a deficit of about \$7,200 in revenue.

A CARES Act donation of \$5,000 through Venango County made up for most of that deficit. Then members and supporters came through with more than enough to close the remaining gap. The museum finished the difficult year with some retained earnings — most of which will be used for the projected losses of 2021.

Budget restraints have forced the museum to operate with a volunteer executive director for many years now. A single part-time employee, Mary Nicklin, resigned at the end of November to move south and be nearer to her family. There are plans to eventually hire a replacement for the part-time position.

Each year, the museum acquires a few new instruments and, in spite of the COVID-19 restrictions, last year was no exception.

At the very end of the year, the museum was given a clock organ. It is still not fully restored, but when it is, the clock will play a song on a built-in organ at each hour.

Research is done on each



A clock organ was donated to the DeBence Antique Music World last year. Repairs are needed for the clock, which will play a song on the hour once it is restored.

museum acquisition, and the history of this organ is exceptional.

This clock was originally the property of Maj. Charles Plenderleath of Nelson Crescent, a seaport in England. It cost him 150 guineas, about 20,000 of today's dollars.

Plenderleath was in the 49th Regiment of the British Army, the unit Gen. Isaac Brock brought to Canada and led to capture Detroit. Although Brock died at Queenston Heights, the 49th was a tried and tested unit and Plenderleath an experienced veteran.

That experience told him his men were in trouble at Stoney Creek. The British had gambled on a daring night attack on the superior American

camp. They had approached with unloaded muskets in what was supposed to be a fairly quiet bayonet assault and crept in the darkness right into the lines of the enemy. But on first contact, cheering British officers alerted American forces they were under attack and the Americans quickly rallied, loaded their guns and began firing.

The British troops were in a quandary. They had partially disassembled their muskets — removing the firing mechanism to prevent an accidental discharge — so they had to re-install their flintlocks and load their muskets. That meant they would be easy targets for the Americans. But fleeing meant they could be routed in

the dark or attacked in the morning by the stronger American force they'd been hoping to stop.

Plenderleath did neither. He'd heard heavy cannon firing from nearby his position. Very nearby.

The following extracts are taken from an account of Stoney Creek given by Lt. James Fitzgibbon, 49th Foot, in a private letter, dated June 7, 1813, to the Rev. James Somerville of Montreal:

"Maj. Plenderleath came immediately after to that portion of the line which I had quitted, and, with the men I had left in charge of a sergeant, and a few others, he rushed forward against the guns and took four of them. ... Maj. Plenderleath pushed on with about 20 men, following the main road, the men stabbing every man and horse they met with. This handful of men with Maj. Plenderleath took at this dash, besides the two American generals [Chandler and Winder], five field officers and captains, and above 100 prisoners, and brought them off.

"I am of opinion that, had not Maj. Plenderleath made the dash he did, the Americans would have kept their ground and our ruin would have been inevitable."

He left the service as Lt.-Col. Plenderleath and was placed on half pay and saw no further active service. He died in 1854.

The future at DeBence is uncertain until the pandemic is under control, but the Oil Region Music Preservation hopes to restart museum programs for school tours and mini-events as soon as allowed, although this seems unlikely in 2021.

The museum has been gifted with two important machines, but they are in Ohio and cannot be taken to the Franklin site due to travel restrictions.



The Karma Coffee Co. hosted a series of fundraising concerts to benefit the renovation project at the Lyric Theatre.

Lyric renovation project continues

This article was provided by the alliance.

Work continues on the renovation of the 1927 Lyric Theatre in Oil City.

The pandemic has impacted income and presented safety concerns for contractors and volunteers alike, said Joe Boland, president of the Colonel Drake Cultural Alliance.

The pandemic has provided the opportunity to revisit plans for heating, ventilation and air conditioning. Fortunately this will allow them to be adapted for the latest viral control systems and upgrades.

Four of the six foundation footers to support the steel structure for the second floor and roof were completed in 2020.

Due to their location, the footers had to be excavated by hand and the concrete delivered in wheelbarrows.

The steel for Phase 1 has been ordered and will be stored for future installation.

It has been determined that adding the construction for Phase 2 now will contain costs and close in the building from the elements.

Engineering for the final two footers is being completed so cost estimates can be formulated to complete the first and second phases.

The board is currently exploring new fundraising directions with the goal of completing Phase 1 & 2 in 2021.

A series of fundraising concerts at Karma Coffee Co. were necessarily suspended but organizers and volunteers expect to resume when conditions allow.

Donations may be directed to Colonel Drake Cultural Alliance, P.O. Box 1145, Oil City.

The Colonel Drake Cultural Alliance is a charitable organization, recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (501c3) and registered with the Pennsylvania Department of State.



Concrete for foundation footers at the Lyric was taken to the job site via wheelbarrows.

CR Music offers DJ services

CR Music Co. offered its DJ services last year, despite the "limited capacity" rules from the state that squelched the ideas of people planning weddings and other events.

Randy D. Covell, owner of the Oil City-area DJ service, said he "still managed to DJ for three weddings in 2020."

"Over my 14 years in busi-

ness, we have done over 110 weddings," Covell said.

The service, with one full-time and one part-time worker, offers DJ services for weddings, graduations, private parties and karaoke events.

Things are looking up a bit, Covell said. "We have already booked two weddings for 2021," he said.

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