



is marketed by its owners.
(Weston Forum/Brian Gioiele photo)

Mill on block

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Business as usual

Nothing's changed at Cobb's Mill Inn

By Brian Gioiele

Talk of Cobb's Mill Inn's demise has been greatly exaggerated. While it is up for sale, the historic restaurant remains open for business and will remain open for the foreseeable future, according to one of the owners, Domenic Cocchia.

The mill and will continue to be a full-restaurant as well as offer a catering business," said Domenic, who is the restaurant with his brothers, Frank, and Robert Testa.

News had circulated for weeks about a pending sale and possible closure of the local landmark restaurant, but Domenic only officially went on the market two weeks ago.

Domenic has been getting calls ever since the news was in the newspaper (The Weston Forum, Feb. 7 issue) from brides asking if they can hold their reception; from people who can redeem gift certificates; Domenic told The Forum Thursday that people to know we are still open, and will be open for the foreseeable future.

Cobb's Mill Inn is being marketed by ESG — one of the country's commercial real estate services firms — but, according to Domenic, so set sale price and no potential

matter of fact, Domenic said, the mill is not only functioning as usual but also expanded its offerings in an effort to even further expand its clientele. Last Tuesday, Cobb's Mill Inn began lunch. And the restaurant will also offer monthly theme wine dinners. A unique program available to the public is the prix fixe menu, a four-course \$20 Sunday through Wednesday, Friday through Saturday. And do not be fooled by the price, Domenic said. The menu remains the same — for example, Wednesday's meal choices consisted of mussels; field greens salad; and

choices of pan-seared mahi-mahi, broiled lemon sole, baby veal rack or grilled rib-eye steak; with a dessert selection of banana cream brulée or New York cheesecake.

"This has been a very profitable business over the years," Domenic said, "but we are trying to attract the local resident who might have just pass us by over the years. Hopefully, these new offerings will help attract those people."

One of the restaurant's most successful ventures is wedding receptions — Domenic said some 150 are booked through the next 18 months and all will go on as scheduled, whether he is the owner or not.

"We will book more and honor every one. Whoever buys Cobb's Mill will have 150 weddings on the books and they'll honor every one," he said.

And one of the main reasons for the popularity of this restaurant is its charming appearance both inside and out, overlooking the Saugatuck River as it tumbles 40 feet over a 200-year-old dam.

The structure is also one of the oldest in the country, with the south end of the current building built sometime between 1750 and 1775, according to historians.

During the 1800s, the building, then known as the Davis Mill, was operated as a grist and lumber mill that used manmade dams to harness water power. In the early 1900s, however, the mill ceased to function.

In 1913, the mill was purchased by Frank Cobb, then editor-in-chief of the *New York World*, and his wife, Margaret Ayer Cobb, who made the purchase for the rights to the mill pond for swimming and skating.

Mrs. Cobb sold the inn in 1927, at which point it housed its first commercial enterprise, an antiques shop and tea room. In the early 1930s, alterations added the terrace under the falls and the northern wing.

From 1952 to 1986, the facility was operated as an old-fashioned New England inn. Since 1770, Cobb's Mill Inn has had only

WHY THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT ROOM?

Recently we met with Domenic Cocchia of Cobb's Mill Inn and asked if he had any stories of the restaurant in the days since he became manager in 1986. Mr. Cocchia remembers stories of Presidents Carter, Bush and Roosevelt all dining at Cobb's Mill and Marilyn Monroe having a suite of rooms at the Inn as did Philip Wein and Al Capp.

However, Mr. Cocchia favorite story is how the main dining room came to be known as the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Room. Frank I. Cobb, owner of the Cobb's Mill Inn and surrounding land and buildings worked in New York City for New York World. Mr. Cobb had many connections through his job and in 1912 President Elect Woodrow Wilson asked Frank Cobb who he thought would make a good Secretary of the Navy. Without question, Frank highly recommended Franklin D. Roosevelt for the job.

This tidbit of information was gleaned by Domenic as he was reading the *Age of Roosevelt - Vol. 2*, by Arthur Schlesinger. We are glad that Mr. Cocchia has such a love of history or that question may have gone unanswered for generations.



Domenic Cocchia wants the community to know Cobb's Mill Inn is running business as usual.

four proprietors, including its current owners, who purchased the business 16 years ago.

Over the past 15 years, the mill has become one of Fairfield County's most well-known restaurants. Its gourmet food and excellent service has perennially earned *Wine Spectator's* "Award of Excellence" and *Connecticut Magazine's* "Best Continental Restaurant-Statewide, and Most Romantic-Fairfield County." It has become one of the region's most sought after locations for parties or events for brunch, dinner or "anything in between."

At present, nine different dining rooms serve the restaurant's continental cuisine in scenic settings that include a manmade waterfall, as well as river and woodland views.

"So much has changed over the years..." said Domenic, who serves as the day-to-day operations manager.

"We never used to get walk-ins. We were almost exclusively reservations. Now that's about equal," he said. "And we used to be exclusively jacket and tie. Now we have a more relaxed atmosphere, to mirror the corporate casual of today."

With regard to dining, the menu has gone from classic French cuisine to regional American; from flour-based sauces to more natural juices.

"The demographic of the town has changed, with a huge influx of savvy New Yorkers coming in," Domenic said. "In years past, we were more of a touristy attraction."

But while the years have seen much change with Cobb's Mill Inn, one aspect that will not change, whether it is sold or not, according to Domenic, is the present function of the establishment.

"This has been and will always be a food-service operation," Domenic said. "What I want people to know is that we're not closing anytime soon. It's still business as usual."