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For Information Contact:
Ken Hayward
Executive Vice President
(517) 349-4600

Bob Berg
Berg Muirhead and Associates
(313) 872-2202

Grand Hotel to manage Mackinac Island's Village Inn Restaurant

MACKINAC ISLAND, MI—Grand Hotel and Dennis Cawthorne, owner of the Village Inn restaurant on Mackinac Island, have signed an agreement for the hotel to manage and operate the restaurant, effective Nov. 1.

The restaurant has been owned by Cawthorne and his wife, Cynthia, since they built and opened it on a vacant lot on Hoban Street in the island's downtown in 1981. It will be renamed Cawthorne's Village Inn – a Grand Hotel Restaurant.

“From our perspective, this is an ideal marriage of what has been a traditional island hospitality spot for 30 years with the expertise and high standards of quality and attention to detail for which Grand Hotel is known around the world,” Cawthorne said. “We wanted to make sure we found a manager who appreciates and understands the tradition of both our restaurant and Mackinac Island and, of course, no one understands tradition and the island more than the Musser family and the staff at Grand Hotel. We are looking forward to a very successful relationship with one of Michigan's iconic companies.”

Grand Hotel President R. D. Musser III said the hotel “will maintain the spirit and atmosphere for which the Village Inn is known, including some of their signature menu items such as their planked whitefish. At the same time, we plan to develop a menu featuring more Michigan products and with organic selections.”

One item that will be added to the menu will be cherry pie made from the recipe Cynthia Cawthorne's Aunt Marge Peterson used in 1947 to win the national cherry pie baking contest. Mrs. Peterson presented one of her pies to President Harry Truman at a White House ceremony.

“Cherry pie and our traditional pecan ball will be the featured deserts,” Musser said.

Musser said the restaurant will close for renovations Nov. 1 and then reopen Dec. 1, the day before the island’s annual Christmas Bazaar.

Cawthorne has been a part of Mackinac Island since 1960, when he went to the island as a college student to take a summer job driving carriages.

“By mutual agreement with the carriage company we decided I would be a better greeter and loader than carriage driver,” Cawthorne said. “But I was hooked on the island and have been involved in it continually ever since.”

Cawthorne’s next island job involved running the Island Chamber of Commerce during summers as a Harvard Law School student from 1962-65.

By appointment of the governor, he has been a member of the Mackinac Island Park Commission since 1991 and currently serves as chairman of the commission, a position he has held for more than 17 of the 20 years he has been a member. Cawthorne also is a partner with former Attorney General Frank J. Kelley in the Lansing law firm of Kelley Cawthorne. He also is a former member of the Michigan Legislature, having retired in 1979 after serving as the Republican Leader in the House.

Musser said Cawthorne’s Village Inn – a Grand Hotel Restaurant will be the fifth restaurant the hotel operates on the island separate from the hotel facility. The others are The Jockey Club at the Grand Stand, located on the first tee of the golf course across Cadotte Avenue from the hotel; the Gate House, located down the hill from the hotel; Woods, located in the center of the island, and the Tea Room at historic Fort Mackinac.

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