


**NOW  
AND THEN**


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At left, the Shenango Inn around its 10th birthday in 1960 or slightly earlier when it was a community-owned hotel. The postcard was made from a photograph by Herald photographer Chuck Porter.

Below, the years have been kind to the inn, which today is an assisted-living home for seniors.

## When the Valley built a community-owned hotel

By John Zavinski

**D**ELAYED FIVE DAYS by a blizzard, a decades-old dream was fulfilled when the Shenango Inn opened its doors on Nov. 29, 1950, meeting the Shenango Valley's "dire need" for a modern hotel.

According to Herald files, the idea began in the late 1920s but ended after wrangling over location. In 1945, industrialists Hugh J. Garvey and H.V. Putnam tried again, succeeding after getting the F.H. Buhl Trustees to buy the site at 1330 Kimberly Road in Sharon.

The Shenango Valley glowed with civic pride as the enterprise opened free of debt, funded by about \$800,000 raised locally through the sale of \$100 shares.

The four-story, colonial-styled building was designed by Youngtown architects Charles Owsley and John H. Samuels.

Profits paid for a \$252,000 addition in 1955, expanding it to 94 rooms. The Golden Lion Tavern was added for \$170,000 in 1972.

The inn hosted celebrities, business leaders and many a wedding reception. Its potato soup was renowned.

The most notable guest was then-Sen. John F. Kennedy, who arrived at 2:40 a.m. Oct. 15, 1960, during his campaign for president. The next morning, Kennedy addressed 250 at the inn during a \$12-a-plate breakfast.

Years later, a maid revealed that JFK had left his blue bathrobe in the room. It reportedly made its way to the wife of inn manager Bud Wagner, who kept it.

Other notables who stayed there included the Three Stooges, Ed Sullivan, Guy Lombardo, Art Linkletter, Yogi Berra and John Cameron Swayze, according to Herald files.



John Zavinski/Life & Times



A colorized view from around 1950, before the inn's eastern wing was added in 1955.

By 1978, the hotel operated in the red for three years after declining profits since the peak net income of \$51,254 in 1971. The inn, located in a residential neighborhood miles from Interstate 80, lost its captive market to new motels at nearby interchanges.

In 1965, 80 percent of the ownership was in the hands of those with only one to three shares. In the end, the 1,500 mostly local shareholders included individuals, churches and civic organizations. Sharon General Hospital held 22 percent of the shares.

In 1979, the late James E. Winner Jr. and his wife Donna got their start in the innkeeping business by buying out the stockholders for \$747,500.

The Winners sold it in the late '80s. It was transformed into Cordia Commons senior assisted living and today is Juniper Village at the Shenango Inn, with about 100 residents.

And one of them can boast, "A future president slept here." ♦