


**HOSPITALITY
& TOURISM**

The Buhl Mansion

Guests from near and far get royal treatment at Sharon industrialist's opulent castle

By Chris Lehberger

Behind the Buhl Mansion's antique stone walls lies a land of fairytales.

From affluent spa treatments to lavish dining in an utterly private and serene setting, Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa is a world-class hospitality institution on the edge of downtown Sharon.

The Romanesque stone castle, which was completed in 1896, was built by a name synonymous with the Shenango Valley: Frank H. Buhl.

Buhl, who built the mansion as a wedding gift for his wife Julia Forker, is known as the father of the industrial Shenango Valley. However, outside of Buhl's steel legacy, Buhl had his hand in other trades – and cities – alike.

The son of Christian H. Buhl, who led his family to be named as one of the most influential families in Detroit, Frank Buhl adopted the entrepreneurship of his father, who moved to Detroit to import hardware and soon became a kingpin in Detroit business, often mingling with high-society icons of the early 1900s, such as Henry Ford.

However, when Frank Buhl moved to the valley to manage one of his father's steel plants, little did he know of the lasting fingerprint he would leave on the valley.

After building a conglomerate of iron and steel businesses in Western Pennsylvania, Buhl sold Sharon Steel to J.P. Morgan in 1902, which would eventually grow into U.S. Steel. Soon after, he went into the land-development, mining and irrigation business, which would lead to cities in Alabama, Idaho, and Minnesota being named in honor of Buhl.

Indeed, Buhl was an acute businessman and philanthropist alike, being the first to invest in the Philippines in a railroad system after the Spanish-American War and by donating \$2 million upon his death in 1918



David E. Dale/Business Chronicle

Laura Ackley, general manager of Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa, sits in a parlor next to the library. The bed and breakfast is owned and operated by James E. Winner Jr. and his wife, Donna, who lovingly restored it.

to France and Belgium to clean up after World War I.

In addition, Buhl launched missions locally including the F.H. Buhl Club, Buhl Farm park and free, 9-hole Buhl Farm Golf Course.

Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and



A table inside the library holds an old Underwood typewriter, a Tiffany-style lamp and photographs of weddings held at the bed and breakfast.

Spa, however, remains as one of Buhl's final economically successful additions to the valley.

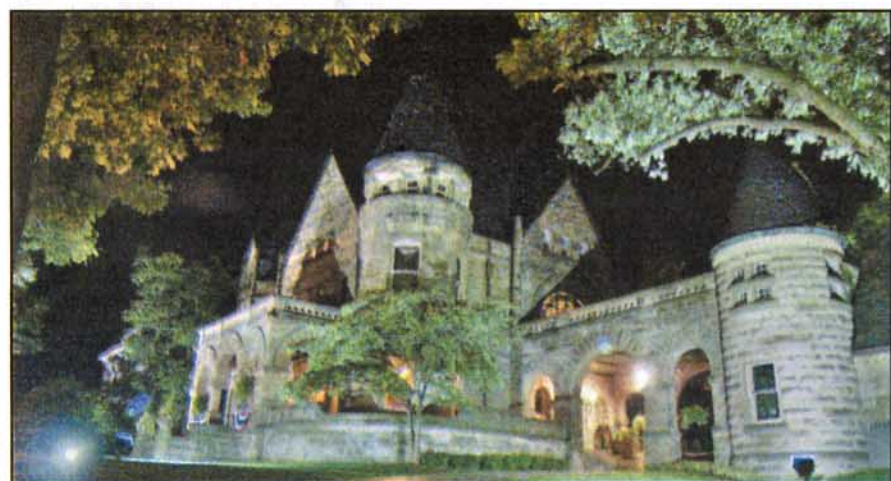
Adorned in grand spectacle, the mansion-turned-guesthouse boasts an utterly luxurious ambiance, appropriate for weddings and business re-

treats alike; a 150-year-old grand Steinway garnishes the foyer while crystalline stained glass filters the sun in from the second floor. Dashing marble floors and hand painted oil replicas of art from Rembrandt to Monet permit a feeling of unceasing



David E. Dale/Business Chronicle

The ornate parlor at Buhl Mansion explains why the bed and breakfast has been named among the top 10 most romantic American Inns and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



John Zavinski/Business Chronicle

It took most of the 1890s for Frank H. Buhl to build his imposing Richardson Romanesque stone mansion in Sharon. Today, after a \$2 million renovation, Jim and Donna Winner operate it as an upscale bed and breakfast.

elegance, a sentiment which is only to be upset by the mansion's service.

With 10 overnight guestrooms, ranging in price per night from \$350 to \$850, a Buhl guest is treated in luxury. With rooms complete with a fireplace and jacuzzi and with each

named and themed accordingly, the world-class service starts before one even steps out of his car, director of marketing Laura Ackley said.

"Everything happens behind the stone walls," she said. "When people come to Buhl, they're pampered."

The Buhl Mansion Guesthouse & Spa

422 E. State St., Sharon

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people.

Ackley said the mansion is booked nearly every weekend for weddings, with wedding parties using the whole facility and its services to cater to the party and family.

Sunday through Thursday, however, the resort is open for executive retreats and sales conferences, the type that lends itself to the necessity of privacy. At a "substantially" lower price and with dinner served over a 150-year-old mahogany table – perhaps the same table that hosted business deals between Andrew Carnegie and Frank Buhl – businesses and corporations would be treated with the same type of service that resorts like the Bellagio would offer.

However, in a struggling economy, hospitality still survives as a one of the leading fields. Indeed, the Buhl Mansion has had a better first quarter than last year, probably due to the media coverage the mansion has been receiving in addition to cooperative marketing, creative packaging, and the hiring of a new marketing firm for the county.

"Tourism is the second-largest business field in Mercer County," Ackley, who is president-elect of Visit Mercer County PA, said. "We don't just hang our hats on manufacturing."

According to Ackley, clients who come from abroad or as far as California and Florida bring in additional revenues from activities such as golfing and dining, which helps to boost the local business economy.

The mansion, which has been featured in the Post-Gazette and on the front cover of Inns Magazine, is not open to the public. Tours, however, can be given upon reservation. ♦

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Frank H. and Julia F. Buhl

The mansion is owned and operated by James E. Winner Jr. and his wife, Donna. It offers an array of services, including valet and bell services, breakfast in bed, evening turn-down service, and a shuttle to the mansion's sister property, Tara – a Country Inn, in Clark, not to mention the guesthouse's spa that offers over 100 luxurious treatments.

Seven-and-a-half acres of terraced gardens are available for weddings behind the building, including the option of using a tented courtyard for the reception, with a capacity of 120