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Escape into a different time at the Gilmanton Pub

By ADAM DRAPCHO, THE LACONIA DAILY SUN Dec 4, 2019 Updated 14 hrs ago

GILMANTON — How did Bob Ronstadt find himself owning Gilmanton’s newest eatery? It all started with a simple question about 20 years ago.

“Where do you want to live?”

That was Ronstadt’s question to his wife, Becky, who had followed him for decades as his career, first in business and later in academia, took him from state to state. Once they were ready to retire, he wanted to let her decide where to live. Her choice was New Hampshire, and their property search led them to the 1793-era, two-story building known in town as the Temperance Tavern. It’s been the Ronstadt home since 2003, he said.



“We lived here all that time by ourselves, rolling around in here.” To be fair, they’ve been doing more than that. They’re active in nonprofit activities – Bob uses his expertise in the business of universities to consult with graduating high school seniors – and they also opened the Gilmanton Café, a stone’s throw away.

Their home, which was originally built to be a tavern, has seen myriad uses. In between those uses, it had fallen into disrepair, and that was the state in which they found it. The Ronstadts wanted to ensure that the building, with centuries of charm, wouldn’t fall into such disrepair that it might not be restored, and the best way they knew to do that would be to make it profitable.

"It doesn't make it as a bed and breakfast, it doesn't make it as a general store, it doesn't make it as a boarding house," Ronstadt said. "Let's take it back to its roots."

The Gilmanton Pub opened in time for summer, and Ronstadt said business "was amazing beyond my expectations," although they hit their first hurdle before their first order was placed.

"I don't think people know that, three days before we opened, our chef said she couldn't make it." Ronstadt said the bartender backed out two days before opening. "So my wife jumped in, I jumped in, the other surprise was that we were supposed to have a soft opening." Instead of just a few couples showing up, he said, "the word went around like a grass fire."

The rest of the summer was "fantastic," Ronstadt said.

The menu features casual food. Bruschetta and the charcuterie platter are the favorites for appetizers, with lobster ravioli and gumbo the sales leaders for main dishes. Ronda Lines is the day-to-day chef, while Rembs Layman, the Ronstadts' son-in-law, visits to prepare the Louisiana-inspired dishes. Krista Nielsen manages the restaurant, and Crystal Perry and Trisha Clough tend the bar.

The Gilmanton Pub's main attraction, though, is the space. It's a building that has served as a meeting place of one kind or another for centuries.

"Our experience with this place over the years is that it's really magical, it fosters creative thinking," Ronstadt said. As such, he wants his guests to linger, to feel that they're welcome even after they've finished eating.



Nielsen, the manager, said its the pace and the atmosphere that first-time patrons find most surprising.

“A lot of the comments are, ‘This is not what we thought it was.’ They expect really upscale, then they realize that it’s a lot more laid-back and hang out-ish. They like the homeyness of it,” Nielsen said.

Ronstadt thinks that type of experience will help the business earn repeat customers.

“To me, I guess it was a reaction to going to so many restaurants in the Lakes Region and beyond, and they’re so geared to the notion of table turn and maximizing every buck that they lose sight of the forest for the trees. I guess we were in the situation where we really wanted to please people, we wanted people to have a good experience, and that means not being rushed.

“Part of the motivation was to find a way to keep this sustainable, we’ve got a real good shot at doing that,” Ronstadt continued. “It will be be nice to think that this place will still be here, in good shape, 50, 60, 70 years from now, when we’re no longer here.”

The Gilmanton Pub is located at 506 Province Road, and is open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday.

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