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Restored again, The Gables counts its blessing this Easter

LBI landmark rebuilt after fire last Easter, Hurricane Sandy

Last Easter, the owners of The Gables Restaurant and Inn stood, shocked, in the middle of Centre Street with evacuated holiday diners, watching firefighters unleash torrents of water in a desperate attempt to save the historic Victorian Long Beach Island landmark.

After gutting their beloved treasure and working with countless contractors to meticulously restore it to its authentic glory, the restaurant finally reopened just before Labor Day.

Friends who had become family and dedicated foodies from near and far once again flocked to the gorgeous building to enjoy its romantic ambiance and the Zagat-rated cuisine they had missed so much since a carelessly tossed cigarette fueled by high winds ignited outside trash and quickly spread to the structure itself.

The short remainder of the summer was spent trying to recoup lost revenue and preparing for a fall and early winter season that is usually busy with customers who prefer the more serene seasons to the summer bustle.



Owner Sondra Beninati was grateful that no one had been hurt during the fire and that the tedious, costly, and lengthy renovation process had paid off.

“The place looked majestic again, and everyone seemed so happy to see us back,” Beninati said. “We were inundated with reservations; brides were coming in and booking their weddings, and the guest rooms were booked,” she said, referring to the five upstairs bedrooms that feature marble fireplaces and bathrooms.

Everything had finally returned to normal.

Then came Sandy.

The vicious hurricane sent ocean water slushing through the downstairs, destroying walls and furnishings that had just been replaced.

“I knew so many people who lost more than we did, so I really didn’t feel too sorry for myself, but I couldn’t help thinking, ‘Not again!’” Beninati said, noting that she had totally restored the place twice – once when she bought the dilapidated 19th century structure in 2006, and again after the fire.

Refusing to throw herself what would have been a well-deserved pity party, Beninati instead quickly began calling her troops – contractors, furniture movers, storage renters, painters, wallpaper distributors, and countless other people who had all too recently come to her aid.

“We survived a fire and a hurricane. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, so you just put one foot in front of the other and do what has to be done,” she said.

Despite insurance delays and all of the other issues that arose for everyone affected by the superstorm, there was not a moment when Beninati considered abandoning what she calls her “Grand Old Lady” or her comrades in the LBI business community.

“This place is a labor of love, and you don’t walk away from that easily,” she said.

With all of the walls and furniture again restored and replaced, The Gables again re-opened on Valentine’s Day, and faithful and eager customers again returned.

This Easter – exactly a year after the fire, five months after the hurricane, and weeks after the third rebuild was complete – Beninati plans to take a second away from the holiday diners and say some special prayers.

“I’ll say a prayer of thanks that the Gables and the whole island is back and will be stronger than ever,” Beninati said. “And then I’m going to pray that they’re right when they say “the third time’s the charm.””