

**Hamburg Industrial Development Agency
Board of Directors Meeting
May 15, 2009**

Avanti Mansion 4409 South Park Avenue, Hamburg, NY

Present

Steve Walters
Marcella Fugle
Tom Moses
Matt Dils
Norma Rusert-Kelly
Kevin Smardz

Excused

Pattie Paul
George Lee
Paul Pellicano

Guest

Laurie Clark

Executive Director

Michael J. Bartlett

- **Motion** to open the Board of Directors meeting at 9:13 a.m.

- **Motion** to approve the minutes from the April 21, 2009 Board of Directors meeting.

Moved: Marcella Fugle

Seconded: Matt Dils

Ayes: Walters, Rusert-Kelly, Moses, Smardz

Nays: None

Carried

- **Executive Director Bartlett** introduced Laurie Clarke, owner of the Avanti Mansion who proceeded to give a history of the property and outline her plans for the construction of a 12,000 sq ft banquet facility.

A Labor of Love at First Sight

In June of 2004, when Laurie Clark first drove onto the former McNaughton Estate, she knew it was the ideal location for her catering company. The tree-lined driveway, acres of green grass, surrounding woodlands and southern-styled mansion were the perfect setting for her much needed expansion. The only thing that stood between her and her dream was eight years of abandonment and neglect.

The property had been vacant since 1996 when the owner of the US Sugar company was forced to close the doors and time had taken its toll. Vandalism left the mansion with broken windows, missing doors and debris everywhere. Ignored maintenance resulted in extensive damage to the interior and wildly overgrown landscapes. It was hard to imagine that in 1915, author Mark Hubbell featured the estate in his book "Beautiful Homes of Buffalo". Despite the condition, Laurie and her husband, Dave, set out to revitalize this historic property to its once esteemed stature.

In order to transform the property from its current state, into a premier catering venue, the Clark's focused on the mansion and its curb-appeal. With an overwhelming amount of work to do, and limited funds, the vast majority of work was done by the Laurie, Dave and their supportive family and friends.

So in the fall of 2004, they got started. The mansion, water tower, play house and stable were each hand scraped and painted. Numerous glass windows were replaced in all of the buildings. Fallen trees and overrun brush were cleared to make way for a new grand circle entrance. And in order to comply with the town's building code, a 500 ft sewer line was installed. From the outside, it was beginning to shape up, but the inside still needed much work.

As winter approached, the Clark's focused their attention on the mansion's interior. First on the list was reestablishing heat and running water. After that, a new electric service was installed. Next on the agenda was to make the first floor presentable. And oh, yes, relocating the wild life residents.

Old wall-to-wall carpeting was glued to every square inch of the mansion's flooring. Upon tearing out the carpet, the Clark's discovered the original hardwood floors which were then sanded and finished. The highlight of this project was a surprise in the conservatory. Underneath the glued carpeting was a layer of concrete floor leveler. After more than twenty hours of hand chiseling away the concrete, they discovered the room's original burgundy mosaic tiles and checkered white border. Finally, historic wall colors replaced the peeling wall paper and acquired furnishings made the interior warm and inviting. Once spring came around, the first floor was completed and the focus turned back to the exterior. Over the winter, numerous clients had reserved dates for the upcoming 2005 season. Since most of the events were weddings, provisions had to be made to deliver what they had been promised.

A one-acre parcel, just south of the mansion, was transformed to include a custom-built pergola for onsite ceremonies, a tented event structure and pathways to and from the main house. Hundreds of period-appropriate trees, plants, shrubs and flowering annuals were planted.

Nine months after they first began, in June of 2005, the Avanti Mansion's improvements were visible from South Park Avenue and guests gathered for the grand opening.

While the Clark's celebrated their accomplishments so far, the real work was about to begin. Restoring an old mansion was just the precursor. The real goal was to create the ultimate facility for weddings, social events and corporate galas.

Unlike most facilities in western New York, the Avanti Mansion was NOT interested in creating a large multi-functional space for banquets. Instead, they would host just ONE EVENT at a time, providing their clients a private and intimate setting for special events. Laurie believed that by combining this unique atmosphere with exceptional customized culinary creations, and uncompromising hospitality, you'd have an experience that would surely be remembered as the "Event of a Lifetime"!

From 2005 to 2008, the Clark's continued to invest their funds and efforts into the 27 acre estate. Renovations to the second floor of the mansion were completed, including re-establishing all seven original bedrooms and two bathrooms back to their original glory. Another large project was rejuvenating the Japanese garden and lily pond, which is now the main location for wedding ceremonies.

Other improvements included repairing the historic anchor chain and stone pillars, constructing a new service building, (complete with a commercial kitchen and restrooms) and new roofs on the main mansion, cottage house, play house and water tower.

Five years later, Laurie and her company have exceeded their initial expectations and have gained national recognition for their accomplishments. Her award winning team was recently featured in Catersource magazine (an international catering publication). In addition, the company has been nominated for three prestigious awards: the 2008 A.C.E. (Achievement in Catering Excellence) award, 2008 Best Themed Event (International Caterers Association) and 2006 Best Picnic (International Caterers Association).

Carl Sack, Director of consulting services for Catersource, recently had this to say about the Avanti Mansion:

"Without a question, the Avanti Mansion is an impressive event venue. The Japanese Garden with its pond and island setting for wedding ceremonies, the mansion itself, and the garden event space are all very attractive for weddings.

We have visited many event venues in all different markets around the country, and the Avanti Mansion is one of the most impressive venues we have seen."

These accolades would be impressive for any company, but for Avanti Mansion, they are even more coveted since

they achieved them while operating a seasonal (May-October) OUTDOOR facility in Buffalo, NY.

With more demand than opportunities for fulfilment, Laurie once again began searching for options to expand her company. With 27 acres of property, several ideals were considered. However, in the end, the decision was made to build a year-round facility on the north end of estate. With the help of an architect, the Clark's have designed a beautiful 12,000 square foot facility that will give clients the best of both worlds - old and new.

Particular attention was given to the structure's design. To preserve the historic appeal of the property, the new exterior will have similar characteristics to the existing building: White cedar shake shingles, red roofing materials, oval decorative windows and a large wrap-around veranda. The interior will be the perfect balance between turn-of-the-century architecture and modern conveniences. Rich wood tones and an antique fireplace are planned for the spacious foyer, while the main ballroom will feature a wall of windows overlooking the Rush Creek gorge and a romantic, grand staircase and balcony.

From a food service perspective, this new facility will be the FIRST Certified Green Catering Facility in the area. The Avanti Mansion has redesigned its operations to incorporate green standards, such as: waste reduction and recycling, utilizing sustainable foods and material, and water/energy efficiency. In addition, the chef and her culinary team only use fresh herbs, grown on the estate!!

For the Bride and Groom: two on-site ceremony locations will be created (one indoor and one outdoor), a large bridal suite is planned and beautiful gardens will be designed for everlasting photo opportunities. The new facility will continue to offer traditional sit-down and buffet menus, as well as, unique dining style alternatives, like their S.T.Y.L.E. events and Live Grill options. And to make the planning simple and stress-free, the Avanti Mansion will unveiled its new bridal design room, complete with tablescapes, specialty linens, china options, floral samples and so much more!! This will truly be one-of-a-kind, all-inclusive facility!! Ground breaking is planned for this summer, with an estimated winter completion date.

Once finished, the Clark's have several other projects they plan on pursuing. The first is to regain access to the wooded areas by re-establishing the two existing bridges. On the north end, original brick paths will be refurbished to allow guests to stroll the grounds and view the historic railway and trolley stop. On the south end, the Clark's dream of rebuilding the Kabuki (Japanese translation - dancehall) into another event facility. Smaller projects on the "to-do list" are refurbishing the pet cemetery and recreating the formal rose gardens. Eventually, the Clark's hope to make 4409 South Park Avenue their permanent residence.

- **Executive Bartlett** explained that this meeting was to give the Board the opportunity to see first hand what has been accomplished and what is planned. After the presentation the Board agreed to schedule a public hearing for the project on Thursday, June 18th 2009 at 8:00 a.m.

- **Motion** to adjourn at 9:51 a.m.

Moved: Kevin Smardz

Seconded: Norma Rusert-Kelly

Ayes: Walters, Dils, Fugle, Moses

Nays: None

Carried

* Following the Board of Directors meeting, a tour of the property was given.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Bartlett
Executive Director