

By Wayne Witkowski
Pike & Monroe Life Editor

November 07, 2014 2:01AM

Business as usual at Bushkill Inn

Christopher Calo, less than two months on the job as general manager of the Bushkill Inn, gets a baptism of fire this weekend when the eighth annual Classic Rhythm and Blues Weekend and Empowerment Conference takes place.

The event had been held previously at the Fernwood Hotel and Conference Center, which closed earlier this year.

Hundreds of people are expected to converge, many of them having attended previously, to see a concert on Saturday night featuring acclaimed entertainers Ray Goodman & Brown, Carl Carlton, Blue Magic, the Unifics and Bloodstone. Although not as spacious as Fernwood's Rec Center, the Bushkill Inn theater will be filled to the capacity of accommodating 1,000 people and a full sound and light stage.

It's part of a three-day event that also features live entertainment on Friday night at the venue. The rooms are booked and the lounge is expected to be packed.

It's challenging for the staff but business as usual for the resort, even though it is emerging in a structured, audited plan out of Chapter 11 bankruptcy shepherded by Calo, who has had prior experience in that regard as he works under the management group of Pocmont Holdings LLC and the hotel advisory company LWHA based in midtown Manhattan brought on to oversee management and improve financial performance.

Gary Isenberg, LWHA's president of Asset and Property Management Services, said he "expects to emerge out of bankruptcy after the first of the year, in the first quarter" as he commended the condition of the property, which in recent years had its hotel and complementary cabins refurbished and renovated. "It's in extremely good condition with only minor repairs and replacement," Isenberg said.

Its website mission statement reads "LW Hospitality Advisors (LWHA) specializes in a wide range of advisory, valuation, feasibility, investment counseling, asset management, property management, and transactional services focused on hotels, resorts, gaming properties, and conference center assets worldwide. LWHA works with corporate, institutional, and individual clients, as well as with municipalities and governmental agencies on all facets of hospitality real estate. LWHA is a leading hospitality valuation and advisory services firm whose executives have more than 70 years of combined broad hotel experience.

Many of the eight hotels that Calo managed, including his previous one at Trump Plaza Hotel in Danbury, Conn. for three years emerged out of Chapter 11, which does not close the business but implements a structured recovery.

"I want to get everything structurally in place," Calo said. "I'm managing them through this bankruptcy period."

Calo said the Bushkill Inn is distinctive from other properties he has managed.

"Bushkill Inn is definitely more of a leisure based hotel," Calo said. "There's competition around but this is more of a family destination."

Isenberg's company oversees as many as 18 properties at a time and says Bushkill Inn "is not all that much different" from hotels based on business trip and conference bookings overseen by his company.

The inn will continue to be available for conferences, Calo said, with 15,000 square feet. "It's a significant amount of meeting space," Isenberg said, but he pointed out that can include weddings, family reunions and other social events.

Calo, who recently had a meeting with community leaders about the hotel's recovery, said all services at Bushkill Inn remain the same, including the lounge bar that will extend its hours past 9 p.m. soon as well as the restaurants and beauty spa. As for personnel changes, it was the one subject where he deflected comment, although Isenberg said there "are no changes in staffing."

"Bookings are going well but it's too soon to tell," said Calo, as some law enforcement responders stayed there during the manhunt for trooper assailant Eric Frein, who was captured on Oct. 30.

"Things are moving along well," Isenberg said. We're starting to see some pickup in reservations, trying to reevaluate our place in the market place."

Isenberg said, adding that a major point of emphasis going forward is marketing online.

"The Internet presence is lacking. Internet booking is very important, especially for an independent hotel," Isenberg said, pointing out it is particularly helpful for independently owned hotels that continue to number strongly on the market.

"It's amazing how important online and social media is these days," said Calo, who agreed that he is making that a priority.

He said a New Year's Eve event is in the works.



Christopher Calo, about two months on the job as Bushkill Inn general manager, said he wants to help the inn emerge from Chapter 11 bankruptcy, expected to take place by the spring, with an emphasis on online marketing and being a business partner with the community.
KEITH R. STEVENSON/Pocono Record

“The most important thing is for people to realize the hotel is open and it’s open to the community to come in,” Calo said. “Everybody should come in and the Bushkill Inn to see what we have to offer.”

Bushkill Inn and Conference Center has had a staff of more than 60, mostly from the Pike and Monroe counties vicinity. Business reportedly was picking up in late summer after a flat winter business caused by severe weather conditions.

The 167-acre property on Bushkill Falls Road, formerly known as the Pocmont Resort, closed in November 2009 and had been owned by the Artzt family for 63 years. Bushkill Inn had a grand reopening in September 2012 after the resort, once valued at \$8.23 million, was purchased for \$2 million by a group of eight partners under the name Pocmont Properties LLC.

The owners include Isaac Greenwald of Greenwald Caterers of Lakewood, N.J. and Nchemya Leiman and Isenberg said the owners remain on board.

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