

ROCHESTER BUSINESS JOURNAL

[PRINT \(javascript:print\(\);\)](#) | [CLOSE WINDOW \(javascript>window.close\(\);\)](#)

Pair to open Fairport inn

By KERRY FELTNER - 9/9/2016

<http://www.rbj.net/userfiles/image/inn2.jpg>

Their big idea was generated through an interaction one-third of Americans largely have stopped having: neighbors talking to each other.

A 2016 report by Oregon-based City Observatory states 30 percent of Americans spend significantly less time with their neighbors than in the 1970s.

Last year in Fairport, however, a chance conversation between neighbors Angela Herral and Pam Renfro helped spur them to go into business together to create something the village of Fairport has craved: lodging.

While the catalyst to their idea was low-tech, its actualization is using today's technology.

Herral and Renfro have turned to Kickstarter, a crowdfunding platform that millions of Americans use, to get their dream of opening an inn off the ground.

Last November longtime Fairport residents Herral and Renfro purchased the Newman-Dean House at 11 W. Church St. The site has been named to the local historic registry and dates back to the 1830s.

After working with the village on zoning and the specifics of the future of the property, the duo turned to Kickstarter.

The Inn on Church as of midweek has been funded by 68 backers reaching over \$35,000 of its \$45,000 goal. The 30-day Kickstarter for the inn's renovation ends Sept. 17.



(<http://www.rbj.net/userfiles/image/inn1.jpg>)

The grand opening for the Inn on Church is slated for around Nov. 1.

To date, the project has been funded by the owners.

“What we think is a misperception of Kickstarter is that it’s a donation,” Herral said. “The Fairport brewery did Kickstarter. They were our inspiration, because what’s cool about the brewery, in that they used Kickstarter, is that now people who backed it go with a sense of ownership. They’re invested in the success, and it has that cool, collaborative community-based feel.

“From the beginning we said we want to be open and transparent; (the project is) rooted in that,” Herral said.

The two have been neighbors for over a decade.

“For 12 years we’ve been across-the-street neighbors and borrowing each other’s tools and watching each other toil in the garages,” Herral said. “We knew early on that we were sort of cut from the same cloth in that way—we are doers.”

The major changes to the inn include breaking up a small bedroom upstairs to allow for three new bathrooms, finishing four guest rooms and furniture expenses. When completed the Inn on Church will have four guest bedrooms each with its own bathroom, they said.

Perfect fit

For Matthew Ingalls, a longtime Fairport resident and owner of Ingalls Planning & Design, the timing is perfect for an inn to be added to the village. His Fairport firm focuses on community master planning, zoning codes and area studies, mainly in urban environments in villages and cities.

“I thought it was just a fantastic idea, mainly because I know this has been talked about in the village, to have some sort of lodging, for well over a decade,” said Ingalls, who has been involved in planning projects for the village for 15 years. “And there’s been a couple of opportunities over the years, especially along the canal, that have fallen through. The particular location is really quite favorable to them, I think, because there’s so much going on in that part of the village.

“It’s just another piece to the puzzle,” he added.

Herral is a cultural anthropologist who taught part time at Syracuse University, Monroe Community College and Nazareth College before becoming a stay-at-home mother for the past eight years. Renfro retired in August from her career as a youth minister of Fairport Methodist Church.

The Inn on Church is a 3,200-square-foot home. It is not a bed-and-breakfast as the owners do not live on site.

“The most stressful and challenging part of this is getting off the ground,” Herral said. “We’re both on the same page of ‘less doilies and more outlets.’ It’s already a fancy house. We don’t need to capture some 1890s time period; we’re not a museum.

“And what we both like is that it’s a nod to the past. You have the beautiful architecture and honestly it’s almost like the village is a nod to the past. People in the village live how we used to live and I don’t feel like a lot of people do anymore.”

Historic home

It is historically referred to as the Newman-Dean House. The back of the house dates to the 1830s with the front half dating to the 1890s.



The front of the house, called the Queen Anne portion—named for the Queen Anne style of architecture popular during the 1880s through the early 20th century—was built in 1893 for William Newman, a businessman who owned Monroe Chemical Works, a factory that made baking powder and baking soda.

It is documented that Newman's home was the only home in Fairport to enjoy indoor plumbing at the time he lived there.

Later, in 1908, it was home to the Cobb family. George Cobb ran the Cobb Preserving Co., which became American Can Co. Today the company site is home to Iron Smoke Whiskey, a local distillery.

In the 1930s the property was home to George Dean, a doctor in the village. The last members of the Dean family left the home in 2010. It had been on the market a couple of times until 2015, when Herral and Renfro purchased it for \$285,000. They have invested nearly \$100,000 in the property and expect to have invested roughly \$150,000, including total renovations and furnishings, by the time the project is completed.

"It was improved and renovated and restored in the late 1990s, and we all watched that happen and then nothing more really happened with it," Renfro said. "I have always thought that this needed to be something more than just a two-family home."

The co-owners hope the inn evokes a sense of modern comfort and relevance while nodding to the past and the spirit of Fairport itself.

Chip Clay, a carpenter, and Dave Carpenter, a plumber, renovated the house in the late 1990s and are back to work on the property. Both are still in Fairport and still invested in the property's future.

"They know more about the house than we do," Herral said.

Village need

In 2004 the village identified a need for a hotel in its comprehensive plan and reiterated the need in 2007.

"I think that what happens is people feel a connection, and they have a vested interest in the success of whatever they're supporting," Ingalls said. "And I think they're probably more apt to support it."

Herral and Renfro feel that they are responding to that call from residents. They believe competition such as

AirBnB Inc. benefits their business since it gets travelers to think about staying in a community. They see no real peers in their market.

"We're drawing on strengths that we're bringing but in a new context," Herral said. "The difference between staying in a hotel by the Thruway exit and staying in the culture of the village—that's going back to (my) anthropology experience in India; I stayed in the villages with local residents, and it's a completely different experience than visiting the Taj Mahal.

"The tourism that is in Fairport is enough to support it, we think. These older houses don't have guest bedrooms so we think of ourselves as a guest bedroom for locals."

The owners of the Inn on Church feel it will be successful for multiple reasons, they said.

The location of the inn lends itself to success, with the Fairport Brewing Co. down the street, the traffic festivals bring to the village, its proximity to the Erie Canal and Eastview Mall, and the potential use by visitors of surrounding colleges.

There is also a desire for travelers to stay in a community nowadays, the owners said.

Another goal is to use it as a venue for events such as baby showers, reunions, small-business meetings or family gatherings.

Fairport has not only fostered the Inn on Church and a neighborly connection between residents—it fosters community overall, Herral says.

"This is nuts not to (purchase it)," she said. "We love house projects, we love architecture. Everything about our personal story of how we began is based on the village of Fairport—the neighborly sense, the community, sense of collaboration—there is a

neat feel about this village.”

“We just had a happenstance chat in the driveway,” she said. “We jumped on it.”

9/9/2016 (c) 2016 Rochester Business Journal. To obtain permission to reprint this article, call 585-546-8303 or email service@rbj.net.