



a view from the
WEST POINT INN

The Newsletter for the West Point Inn Association and Friends

March 2024 • Issue 57

Mission Statement:

The West Point Inn Association exists to preserve, maintain, operate and educate the public about the significance of the historic West Point Inn.

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The newsletter is published with funds provided in memory of Lifetime Member, Ernest E. Emig, and Honorary Member, Harold Allen Atkinson.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mark Northcross

This is my first report to our membership as president of the West Point Inn Association. First, big thanks to all of our members, volunteers and donors. You enable us to offer this extraordinary way to experience Mt. Tamalpais and the wildlands of Marin to the public. I am so grateful!

Second - what goals do I have for my term as president? There are four major programs I want to help move forward:

Get the work for the Member's Lounge done. As many of you know, the ceiling in the Member's Lounge is sagging. The original trusses sitting on the ceiling joists that hold up the roof are slowly but surely failing. We need to replace them. It's a big project. A portion of the roof over the Member's Lounge also needs to be removed to provide access to remove and replace the trusses. The fire sprinkler system for the Member's Lounge will also need to be removed with the old trusses (the pipes run through the trusses) and replaced. The hole in the roof made for access will need to be repaired - and in fact, the entire roof over the Member's Lounge might as well be replaced at the same time.

The work will take about two weeks, and is currently scheduled in late June after the Father's Day Pancake Breakfast. But...it will be a major disruption for the Inn. Accordingly we have blocked reservations on our website for the period from June 14th through July 6th. We may be able to open up the cabins for reservations and make the kitchen, pantry and public lounge available. So, please stay tuned for updates on this project.

The combination of the trusses, the roof and the sprinklers is expensive. Right now, we are looking at about \$100,000 in costs, not counting the lost room revenue during construction. The good news is that we can afford this given our large cash balance in excess of \$300,000. We should be able to give a full report on costs and inn closure at the April Member's Meeting.

Finally, I want to thank Michael Jefferies, James Hill and Don Keeley for all the work they have put into this project for the past several months. The foregoing write up does not describe all the complexities of this project, and the support from our members and board for getting it done!

Continued on p2.

Continued from p1.

A long term fire safety plan for the Inn. The community of the WPIA has been very focused on fire safety for decades. That focus was primarily on managing the risk from potential fires ignited in the Inn's own buildings and grounds. Climate change has now given us a new challenge: windstorm driven catastrophic wildfires. As many of our members know, the property insurance world in California is reeling from the record catastrophic wildfires of the last several years. Many of you may have lost your homeowner's insurance, or have seen huge premium increases. The Inn itself has \$4.3 million in coverage from Zurich (a non-admitted carrier in California) at a cost of over \$21,000 per year. One of our members, Chris Scheetz, is a professional in the insurance industry, knows the Zurich company and has reviewed our policy. Chris feels that despite the high expense, Zurich is a very good company and we have a very good policy.

But....the risk of total destruction of the Inn from a catastrophic windstorm driven wildfire on Mt. Tamalpais remains. That risk has gone from being "theoretical", as it was for decades, to very real. Our insured limit of \$4.3 million is not enough to fully rebuild the Inn. How do we respond? Member and volunteer Scott Halsted has spent five years working with Pete Martin in developing ideas for not only fire safety in general at the Inn, but a long term wildfire safety plan. As you know, Pete is no longer capable of serving in that capacity now, and Scott has fully taken over his role.

As you can imagine, there are many different risk mitigation measures for the board and its members to consider: defensible space (how much vegetation do we clear from the perimeter of all of our buildings?) and building hardening (how far do we go in ember control and in making all surfaces of the Inn fire resistant?) are key. There are cost issues, aesthetic issues and the historical integrity of the building itself to consider. On the other side there is a general consensus amongst fire professionals that if the Inn found itself in the path of a windstorm driven wildfire, there is very little we could do make it survive. Finally, there is the number one issue to consider: what can we do to protect our innkeepers, guests and visitors?

I propose to take this year to engage with both the board and our community of members to develop a long term wildfire safety plan for the Inn. The board will hear our preliminary thoughts on this at the March meeting. No conclusions or final decision will be made at that time. With board input, we will present our outline on long term wildfire safety plan at the April member's meeting. Again, no final decisions will be made.

My goal is to develop a consensus amongst the board and the members over the summer and present a final plan to both the board and at the member's meeting in October.

Whatever risk mitigation measures we collectively decide to implement will be scheduled for 2025.

A long term endowment for the Inn. Member and volunteer Pete Karlen has for several months put a lot of work into developing a long term endowment for the Inn. Given the scope of the major maintenance and repair work that could be done at the Inn, Pete has set a goal of raising \$1.2 million for an endowment to fund \$60,000 per year in major work at the Inn for the long term. So far, Pete's work has resulted in at least \$30,000 in donations for the endowment.

Full implementation of the endowment means some changes in how we operate. We need to have a policy for how the endowment money is spent. We need to have a policy on how the money is invested. We need to work closely on a long term basis with potential major donors. Pete has presented drafts of an endowment spending and investment strategy to the board. We are looking at this now. The board will likely adopt a version of Pete's drafts soon. We will keep the membership informed on this exciting new approach to keeping the Inn in excellent shape.

Digital revenue and wireless communication. The bulk of our annual revenues are now electronic transfers into our checking account at Bank of Marin. This makes life easier in one sense, but it makes it harder in another. Electronic transfers oftentimes do not show the source of the revenue, or for what purpose the money is being paid to us. This is a challenge for our accounting system. Our new treasurer, Craig Hill, is working with Marta Gomez, our bookkeeper and our volunteers to make digital revenues more easily accountable.

Another issue with electronic transfers is the relative lack of good wifi at the Inn. Right now, people who want to pay for a meal at a pancake breakfast, for example, do it through a volunteer's Venmo account, using their cell phone number. The volunteer then transfers the money from their own checking account to the Inn's checking account. Given how cumbersome this is, we are looking at setting up a special wifi system for the inn, and having the Inn's own special cell phone/payment system for Venmo.

In addition, communication between the Innkeepers and first responders is primarily over our landline. We cannot rely on the landline always being available. A special inn-only wifi system could also serve as a back-up for emergencies in the event the landline is down. The challenge for us is how to keep the wifi-free integrity of the Inn while providing for wifi for electronic funds transfers and emergency communications. We are working on that, and should have a full report at the April member's meeting.

Thank you all, again, for this opportunity to be of service to this 120 year old inn and institution that we love so much!

GARDEN OF EATIN'

Kathy Kopp

Hello Garden and Inn Lovers-

The garden is somewhat dormant right now, but preparing for a dazzling display this year. It's encouraging to have all this beautiful rainfall, and less drought worries on the nearby horizon.

On your next visit you'll notice there has been a lot of brush clearing around the inn, and majorly between the garden and the road. The garden is no longer a hidden secret. Fire safety is foremost, so this was necessary. The innkeepers continue to compost and contribute to the wonderful garden, so thanks to them we hope for a nice crop of edibles starting this spring.

Hope to see you on the mountain soon.

RESERVATIONS

Jennifer Greene

To make a reservation go to our website westpointinn.com and click "stay" and then "make a reservation". This takes you to our booking engine and you are prompted to type in the member promo code.

This promo code allows you to book 120 days in advance, receive a 50% discount on ONE accomodation per night, and discount on whole inn bookings Tuesday-Thursday. We do not allow whole inn bookings on Saturdays or Sundays. Mondays we are closed.

Please do not share the promo code with anyone. The promo code is currently **BOOTJACK**

WPI bucks are redeemed by presenting them to the Innkeeper upon arrival at the inn.

We look forward to seeing you at the inn soon!



2024 PANCAKE PREVIEW

Lin Johanson

We're gearing up for another great pancake season! Our first breakfast, Mother's Day, is just over two months away. These events have become increasingly popular, and we are expecting in the neighborhood of 700-1,000 people for each occasion. Our full 2024 calendar is: May 12 (Mother's Day), June 16 (Father's Day), July 14, August 11, September 8 and October 13. We serve with a smile from 9 AM to 1 PM.

In order to provide top-notch service for our guests, we need a great group of volunteers. So, if you are interested in helping out, please contact us at pancakes@westpointinn.com and let us know which event you would like to work. We need help with both the breakfast (stay over Saturday night) and the cleanup (stay over Sunday night). It's a great way to help the Inn and bond with other Association members.

We want to acknowledge the tremendous investment of time and energy put in by our hosts for these events. We want to thank Scott & Lisa Halsted, Mark & Antoinetta Northcross, Alyssa Jorgensen & Cassandra Benjamin, Nancy Fox & Patti Schmidt, McCoy Dodson and Lin & Chris Marcuse for stepping up to lead the breakfast teams. We also want to thank our cleanup leaders, but we are still firming up commitments from those hosts. If you are interested in being a host, please contact us.

We also wouldn't be able to pull off these important fundraisers for the Inn if we didn't have a great crew working on the Pancake Committee. A great debt of gratitude to Alyssa Jorgensen & Nancy Fox for all their work on organizing and prepping for the new year; Patti Schmidt for being our tremendous media liaison; and, of course, Alison Bricker for her assistance with graphics and email blasts. We also appreciate Heather McFadden for being our volunteer coordinator and all-around general email question-answerer last year. Unfortunately, due to other commitments, Heather won't be able to help out this year. If you are good with spreadsheets and willing to respond to a multitude of emails (it's not that scary, really!), please contact us. But, again, thank you all for your help in running Pancakes.

And we look forward to seeing you up at the Inn!

PANCAKE BREAKFAST COMMITTEE NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

Alyssa Jorgensen

The PCB Committee is looking for two volunteers to join their team:

1. One volunteer to assist with crew sign-ups. This job can be done from home and will require 4-5hrs/week March through September. The details include managing Google Forms, Spreadsheets, and corresponding with crew members and hosts
2. One volunteer with a reliable truck to make 1-2 runs/mo from Sonoma County to the West Point Inn and deliver/stock goods. This delivery will need to take place the Saturday prior to each Pancake Breakfast event. Must be in good physical condition.

Thank you very much for considering joining our team. There are a few other odd jobs we could use help with, so please reach out to Alyssa at alysajorgensen@gmail.com





INAUGURAL COOKING CLASS

Patti Schmidt

On February 13th at 10am 8 students arrived at the West Point inn and donned their aprons. We were about to begin a cooking lesson with accomplished chefs Fran Rondeau and Nancy Fox. After warming up with coffee and muffins we were put to work chopping, mixing, sautéing, and kneading as we learned how to make our own goat cheese to prepare a mouth-watering leek and wild mushroom pithivier in a buttery puff pastry crust. Nancy Fox also taught how to make our own crackers with seeds and other toppings so that we could partake of the many goat-cheese appetizers including logs rolled in various herbs and spices and wild mushroom crostini. Then Fran taught us the secret to making the perfect vinaigrette dressing.

At approximately 1pm the pithivier came out of the oven – a tawny golden brown. We tossed a bountiful green salad and all sat down to a scrumptious lunch followed by a dessert of melt-in-your mouth almond mini-cakes called friands and Nancy's chocolate truffles both of which we learned to make that morning.

Two more Cooking Class Fundraisers will be held during the months of March and April- including one dinner and an overnight. It is rumored that there will be a guest chef or two to add to the fun!

For more info on these upcoming events, please contact Nancy Fox at events@westpointinn.com or Fran at franrondeau@gmail.com



MARCH COOKING CLASS

Fran Rondeau & Nancy Fox

COME ENJOY THE WARMTH AND CAMARADERIE IN THE WEST POINT INN KITCHEN!

Sign up for the second in our series of Cooking Classes now for Sunday, March 17.

WHEN:

Sunday, March 17 - 11am-3pm

“AROUND THE WORLD WITH GRAINS AND GREENS”

COST:

\$100.00

CHEFS:

Nancy Fox, Marc Leblanc, Fran Rondeau

RSVP DEADLINE:

March 7

Send check to Fran Rondeau,

120 Harbor Dr. Corte Madera CA 94925

Make check payable to West Point Inn Assoc.

WORK PARTIES

Donald DeLave

The work parties have been going relatively smoothly since the start of this year. We’ve had a decent turnout considering the last three sessions it was raining. If you are interested in attending a session go to WPI website – events - work party – sign up genius. Attendance is limited to 35 persons and we are only scheduling 2 months in advance. The next 2 sessions are full, though check back a couple days before event for cancellations or a new sign up. At end of each session there is always an excellent lunch prepared by our great chefs.

Some projects that we have been working on are cleaning all areas inside the buildings, organizing the basement, closets, and the “chicken coop” storage shed. Also, we are brush clearing around structures, and doing various repairs. We’re hoping to have some better weather to continue staining the deck and railings, and doing a bit of painting. I want to thank all the volunteers both members and non members who help complete this necessary work.

Work Party Help Wanted

We are looking for co chairs or committee members for work parties. If you’re interested, please reach out to workparty@westpointinn.com. Thank you!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TELEPHONE AT WEST POINT INN

Fred Runner

On Saturday, February 24, on the front page of the Marin IJ, there was a story about A.T.&T., (American Telephone & Telegraph Co.), a company once known as The Bell System, who had applied to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to abandon or sell its landline service though out most of California, a huge web of copper wire and switches that once connected the nearly all of California and the nation. That included the West Point Inn in its first days as an Inn and stagecoach stop on the Mill Valley & Mt. Tamalpais Scenic Railway. It was an impressive piece of technology for an Inn on the frontier at the beginning of the 20th century.

A.T.&T. believes there is enough reliable cellphone and WIFI service that the tremendous cost maintaining the old copper wire system, fixing it when equipment or cables break or short out, is no longer necessary. (Most of us would not call cellphone service at West Point “reliable.”)

For many decades the CPUC required the Bell System to be robust, to withstand storms and moderate earthquakes for the privilege of being a monopoly utility.

The first phone at the Inn hung on the wall in the kitchen next to the doorway to the pantry. It had no way to dial a phone number, there was a crank on the side of the phone to ring an operator. West Point was connected with the railroad’s Tavern of Tamalpais at East Peak and an operator in Mill Valley. It was a “party line,” which means all the phones were connected on one line and eavesdropping on other calls was easy. The Mill Valley operator would ring once for a call to the Tavern and twice for the Inn. (Later, the Pan Toll tollhouse was 3 rings on the same party line.)

Part of the Inn’s stagecoach service could include a boat ride across Bolinas Lagoon for those headed to Bolinas. The first telephone in the Stinson Beach area belonged to William McKennan, the boat operator. It seems likely his phone was connected to the Inn so they could let McKennan know customers were on the way, especially since this was an occasional thing and his fussy boat engine needed time to warm up.

By the 1920s the Inn had a phone number: 8F2. It was still on a party line but as Mill Valley got more and more phones there needed to be a way to identify them. In the early 1940s the Inn got a new phone number: 8J2. That lasted until the 1950s when the Inn finally got its own telephone line. No area code was necessary, the whole Bay Area was “415”, but the Inn’s new phone number was the same as it is today: DUNlap 8-9955 or 388-9955.

For the first few decades, into the 1930s, the West Point Inn had a square white and blue porcelain sign on the porch. There was a big blue bell and the words “Public Station, Local and Long Distance Telephone”. (A similar sign is being offered on eBay for \$1,800.00.)

A telephone in the wilderness. It was a big deal.



1922
Innkeeper Melanie Kliewe (Klee-way) on the horse she and her husband Martin used while they were at the Inn in the early 1920s. Note the square white and blue porcelain sign offering local and long distance telephone service to visitors.

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR EMAIL?

PLEASE UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO

BY SENDING AN EMAIL TO:

MEMBERUPDATE@WESTPOINTINN.COM

WANT TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE?

PLEASE SEND SUBMISSIONS

AND PHOTOS TO

EDITOR@WESTPOINTINN.COM