

# Tea Talk

By Joyce A. Whitaker, owner of the Painted Lady Tea Room

When I dreamed of owning an English tea room as a young girl, I had visions of grandeur that included lace, frills and English teapots. My first instinct was to house the business in a small, quaint cottage, but as fate would have it, many years later, the opportunity to buy a historical Victorian farm house presented itself. The best feature was the location and the possibilities this presented. Being an eternal optimist and a possibility thinker, I could see the property as it could be not the way it was. Many thought I had lost my mind when we began our renovation, specifically painting the ugly brown ceramic block structure a mellow white. But now with its fuchsia and mauve trim and recent new roof, we have gifted the 105 year old beauty with a fresh new, however nostalgic, look. One thing is for sure, passersby can't miss the tall painted lady at the corner of Fifth and Oak.

The three story structure has eighteen inch thick walls, a block foundation and all the requirements bestowed upon us with extreme fire and building codes. This did not come without great expense and absolute resolve. I wish I could say it was a fun ordeal to bring this nostalgic beauty back to grandeur, but it really was a test of strength and determination, and the total backing of Delaware County Bank. I constantly reminded myself that the old adage of "no pain, no gain" applied here. Nearly six years ago, we opened for business by sheer guts. We faced inspectors, engineers and other powers that be, which brought me to tears many times, but every single day I am reminded by my happy, smiling customers, "This is what it's all about." I had a dream and I was willing to pay the price of doing business.

My tea room is as much a neighborhood landmark as the local gas stations that do business on each side. The big difference is the people who pump gas and deliver our mail are greeted with whiffs of freshly baked goodies being emitted from our roof-top exhaust system instead of the smell of gasoline. We felt like a rose between two thorns, but as we have gotten to know our neighbors, we realize we are all providing a service to our customers who count on us.

**Reader's Question:** I have food allergies, what can I eat at your tea room? Mary. Being a tea room allows us to provide wholesome, healthy and freshly prepared foods with no preservatives. This has become popular because many people have allergies and health concerns. Our chef prepares special requests for guests who call ahead with dietary restrictions. Whether you are a vegan or are allergic to onions, nuts, etc., we find a way to serve you if at all possible. We recently added a "low carb" menu for those on the popular Atkins diet and we provide no sugar desserts upon request.

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