

Monroeville's Holiday House



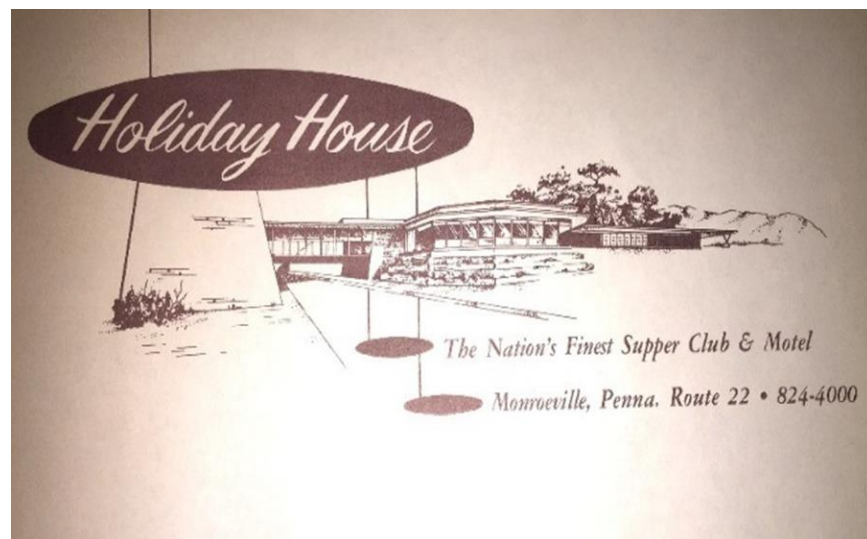
Louis Chandler, Eileen Marie Platt, Robert (RJ) Bertera
Monroeville Historical Society
2021

In October of 1955 John Bertera, along with his brothers (Jim, Bill and Mario) realized a life-long dream when they opened a fine restaurant, supper club and motel in Monroeville at 3755 William Penn Hwy.

It would be called the *Holiday House* and the Berteras envisioned a supper club, with elegant dining, that featured live entertainment for banquets, luncheons and parties. Along the main road in suburban Monroeville, the Holiday House was very much in the tradition of the country roadhouse of stagecoach days -- coaching inns set along the route to provide food, drinks, and rest to the traveling public.



C. John Bertera who with Jim, Bill and Mario Bertera founded Monroeville's Holiday House



An article in the local paper depicted the life of the Holiday House.

Clairton resident, Julia Barbers was there at the beginning and worked there till the end. As a waitress... "It was like one big family, she says of her managers and co-workers... "If something happened to one of us, we all felt it."

Barbers' daughter Kathy McCormick, worked at Holiday House for five years. "It was crazy, but we loved it, McCormick recalls it was a very demanding work environment. The main showroom seated 1,000, which meant that twice a night, the waitresses had to reset that many place settings and bring in first courses in the scant minutes they had between the 8 and 10 pm shows.

She remembers the fun times...one entertainer brought all the waitresses up on stage to dance. Waving their white linens in the air during applause became a tradition.



Courtesy, service and efficiency will be stressed in Holiday House, opening tomorrow with these attractive waitresses who will be under the supervision of Edith Merlin. The staff includes: Bottom row, left to right, Miss Merlin, hostess; Kate Sharo, Frances DePowell, Theresa Traficanti, Irene Fatula, Ann

Cassinelli, Thelma Suchoza, Marietta Simeone, Valerie Cameron and Agnes Supp. Top row, same order, are Lois Merlin, Helen Gelb, Josephine DeRoche, Gloria Bruno, Jeanne Weckerle, LaVerne Hunter, Betty Suskey, Margie Iwanoski and Mary Gobbels.

The Waitressing Staff in 1955

The Holiday House was owned by the Bertera family from Turtle Creek. Patriarch John lived onsite and was the most visible. John's son Robert had an active role, and his grandson Robert J. (RJ) could often be seen terrorizing guests while scooting thru the hallways in his little battery-powered car -- a replica of a full-sized red Mercedes. John's son-in-law, the always dapper Bert Sokol, was on hand to meet and greet guests and see to it that they had a comfortable stay. Hugo Iacovetti often hosted the shows and was well-known locally for his celebrity connections.

George Herr, an architect from McKeesport, was commissioned to draw up the plans for the sprawling modern facility which would include a motel of 18 units and a dining room capable of seating 350. Paul E. Peoples of Wilkinsburg would be named manager and Edith Merlin would supervise a staff of some 20 waitresses. Jimmy Versames, a Greek immigrant with more than 40 years' experience, was hired as head chef.

John Bertera was a local businessman and well known as the popular proprietor of the *Vogue Terrace* restaurant in Wilkinsburg. He would draw on his experience in booking live acts and performers in making the Holiday House, a much-sought after venue for performers all across the county.

The first headliner for the first-floor show was vocalist Eileen Barton who would, in time, be joined by an array of star-studded entertainers: Benny Goodman, Andy Williams, Tony Martin, Cyd Charisse, Milton Berle, Al Martino, Connie Francis, Tony Bennett, Carmen Cavallaro, Ben Vereen and Phyllis Diller.



Monroeville's Holiday House

The Holiday House had three main attractions: the main room; Tuillo's, a coffee shop and cafe; and the lounge which had a dance floor. Banquets, wedding, club meetings, proms, bar mitzvas, showers and seminars were held in one of the meetings rooms: the larger Crystal, Gold, or Red rooms or the smaller Blue, Walnut and Oak rooms. Josie Palmer was director of sales, banquets, and reservations.

The Holiday House also had an outdoor pool, a swim club, a video game room, kitchens, a bakery, laundry area and offices. The hotel had 160 rooms.

Locals remembered: "They had the newest and best disco," says Barbara Sonafelt. "I used to go there on Friday nights to dance. They also had a great Sunday brunch."



The Holiday House with Marquee performers featured

The twilight of the supper club

As the years went by there were persistent rumors of mob connections. It was said that a lot of deals were made in the coffee shop. In time, local crime was to encroach on the Holiday House. Drug deals and the dealers made those who used to attend brunches and events, feel uneasy in the area. A shoot-out in the mid 1980's marked a turning point, when safety in Monroeville became an overriding issue.

Wes Blaha, longtime President of the Monroeville Area Chamber of Commerce, observed that the ultimate failure of the Holiday House had more to do with changing times. As time went on,

it became more difficult to attract celebrities to the smaller venues like nightclubs. Top-tier acts could easily fill larger concert halls and stadiums, increasing the gates for the performers.

For many years The Holiday House was one of the rare suburban venues for live entertainment, since almost all the other local nightclubs were located in downtown Pittsburgh. By the 1980s the era of the supper club was coming to an end as touring performers demanded larger venues like concert halls and stadiums. Where a more sizable gate would assure greater profits for performers.



The Holiday House was demolished in 1988 to make way for a strip mall

Memories of the Holiday House

When you were taking your girl out for that very special night on the town -- there was only one place to go -- only the best would do on such special occasions -- the height of class -- Monroeville's Holiday House

For that very special date: young men would be handsomely clad in a formal jacket. And, as they caught themselves in mirror, they saw an image of the slim build and powerful shoulders, that might well be James Bond in his Savile Row suit. And on his arm in a tightly fitted dress that caressed each sleek curve, his date, had reflected the stylish Jackie Kennedy look: that narrow dress and curved bowl of dark hair suggesting an understated elegance.

Even today, memories come flooding back of those special dates, nights to remember: handsome men and pretty women all in their finery; elegant dinner parties, graduations, award banquets, weddings and bar mitzvahs.

And as the lights grow dark, upon floodlit stage, a celebrity will appear to sing and dance, performing for just this selected audience.

The Holiday House was to close its doors in the late 80s; in 1988-89 the building was demolished to make way for the finery; elegant Holiday Plaza strip mall.

And so the Holiday House remains a fond memory for longtime residents of Monroeville and beyond.



Sources:

Wilksburg Shopper, Wed. Oct 12, 1955.

Joey Guglielmo. Monroeville's Holiday House was a place for Stars to Shine -- *The Times Express*, Nov 6. 2003