

Virginian Hotel has caring new owners

By Mike Armstrong
Reporter, Carbon County Comet

The Virginian Hotel is a famous and historic hotel in Medicine Bow that has seen many guests over the years from all over the state, country and world, but this past March 29, the hotel did something it has never done before.

It hosted a party for Jesse Baker and Aaron Mumford, the new owners and a farewell party for the Scott family, especially Vickie and Vernon (Scotty), who have been owners since anyone can remember. That is because, until March 29, the Scott family had owned The Virginian Hotel since it first opened in 1911.

It did not start out in the Scott family's hands and the hotel took about 10 years to complete.

The hotel began construction in 1901 and was finished in 1911. It was built by August Grimm, the first mayor of Medicine Bow, and his partner George Plummer.

Locals of Carbon County, along with visitors from other parts of Wyoming and the USA, have witnessed this renowned lodging establishment be one of the most modern hotels at the turn of the 20th century, to where it is now-known for how much history it has retained for visitors to witness when they enter its facilities.

The hotel was so revered when it opened, it was called the 'Pearl of the Plains'.

Scotty said the hotel had been named by Grimm after Owen Wister's novel "The Virginian" because Medicine Bow was a dominant character in what is considered by many literary experts as the first commercial Western novel. Wister was in Medicine Bow for a period of time and the

writer slept in Scotty's great grandfather's store that is directly across the street from the present-day hotel. The counter Wister slept on is still there and a literary plaque dedicated to him is on the side of the building.

Scotty said Grimm fully expected the place to be famous for its location on the Lincoln Highway, being near a major railroad terminus and for the name he had given it.

The Virginian was the first place in the area to have electricity, indoor plumbing and a sewer system. The hotel rose up in the town, to become its largest structure. Once finished, it was the biggest hotel between Denver and Salt Lake City.

Grimm was correct about it being a great location, but he ran out of money. He asked for shareholders as the hotel neared completion. That is when Vernon's great-grandfather bought into it.

Grimm sold out to Frank Boyd who in turn sold it to the Scott family.

It has stayed in the Scott family ever since.

Now, The Virginian Hotel has been sold to Jet Hospitality LLC. The owners are Baker and Mumford.

Scotty said selling the hotel was a mix of emotions. "It has been in my family for all my life," Scotty said. "I admit as it went to the new owners, I felt a bit overwhelmed."

Scotty said he wishes Baker and Mumford all the best with their new purchase. "I will keep pushing people to come and visit along with businesses," Scotty said. "I really do wish them all the best in the world. These young men have a lot of ambition and I think they will do well."

The sale of The Virginian Hotel is more than just the huge building that juts out on the horizon as one

Jesse Baker, Vicki Scott, Vernon Scott and Aaron Mumford, past and present owners stand outside the entrance of the "Pearl of the Plains".



Photos by Mike Armstrong

enters the town.

Vicki and Scotty expanded the hotel by buying the old Trampas Motel down US 30 a few blocks down and converted several nearby buildings into motel units.

Eventually, the Virginian Hotel became home to 60 units.

In 1978, the Virginian Hotel was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The hotel had a grand reopening in 1984 after it had been completely renovated and restored to its current turn of the century décor.

The main floor has an 'Eating House,' when a guest first comes through the doors. Then there is the formal 'Owen Wister Dining Room,' where it feels like walking into the past of over 100 years. There is an original first menu on display along with many other items from the past. On the ground floor there is also the 'Shiloh Saloon,' which still has bullet holes in certain places to let visitors know that shootouts were a part of the Wild West.

The two new owners admit that although they have six other resort properties, The Virginian

is unique to their portfolio. Two are in Idaho, one in Montana, one in Utah and two in Washington. Now they have a Wyoming property.

What they have done in the past is renovate a facility that needed some help. Their first project was an old RV park.

Baker is from Platteville, Wisconsin. He grew up there and then went off to college at Cornell University to play football and major in Hotel Hospitality.

Mumford grew up in Oregon near Portland. He said he had hospitality in his blood. "My grandpa was into wireless. He was one of the pioneers and then he bought a resort up there," Mumford said. "My dad is home construction, so my mom and dad were into that and I saw hospitality and how to build something up early in my life."

Mumford said a major lesson he learned from his grandparents while they ran the resort, was to treat the staff well. "It was very inspiring to me," Mumford said. "Then I went east to school."

The two met at Cornell University where both played football and

became roommates. "The first time we met each other was on a recruiting visit for football," Mumford said. "The University was wining and dining us a little and although Ivy League doesn't give full-ride scholarships, Jesse got a lot of help because he wasn't from money."

Although football was something Baker enjoyed, what he really wanted to get into was real estate. "It was what I pursued when I left school," Baker said.

"The hotel/hospitality degree was so useful," Baker said. "We learned the business side of everything, but both of us are aware of the people side of things also and both are equally important."

The two did not form Jet Hospitality LLC right away. Mumford went corporate for 13 years and Baker bought housing properties and flipped them after renovating them.

Then he found an old RV park and he wanted to make a resort out of the property.

"I appraised hotels for about 5 years and then I got into tiny ► 8

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houses before pretty much before anybody else," Baker said. "So I was looking for property I could put these tiny houses on for a resort."

He enlisted Mumford to join him.

"We bought the property on the Washington coast that had 30 RV sites," Baker said. "We renovated an old wooden yacht too, and what we are trying to do is reposition these classic assets and bring them back to life, get them financially sound and reinvest in them."

"Jesse is a great visionary," Mumford said. "He would take a one-unit property and put four units on it."

"When we purchased the second property in Idaho near the Tetons, it was time for Aaron to come on board," Baker said. "The place was a great purchase because of its proximity to Drake, Idaho and Jackson Hole."

Baker said it was important for people to understand they have financed all their purchases and that it wasn't outside money coming in.

"It has been us reinvesting what we made and we have brought in some college buddies for a sliver of a share when we needed it," Baker said. "We are betting on ourselves as we grow our company. We are authentic people trying to make the American dream happen."

Both acknowledge buying a piece of history like The Virginian Hotel and them being outsiders, are going to make some locals nervous.

"We aren't those type of guys who come in from out of state who

don't care about what a property means to a community," Baker said. "We are down to earth and we appreciate what the properties we have bought means to the people around them."

The partners want to work with locals whenever they can. They believe in participating with the communities where they especially like to help programs that are helping children or vets.

The company is new. The first property was bought in 2020. This means by 2024, they have seven properties, now that they own the Virginian.

Mumford and Baker said they feel fortunate to own The Virginian Hotel. Both are history buffs and want to keep the flavor of the famous hotel and be true to its 100-year-plus character.

"This place was on the market for a while," Baker said. "It wasn't a hidden secret that we found, but whoever took this place over was going to have to really care about the legacy that Vicki and Vernon have created. We do."

The partners are excited about what the Scotts have founded and don't want it to disappear.

"What the Scott family has created over the years, blends perfectly in what we envision for this place," Baker said. "The history, the cowboy legacy and the museum aspect of it is giving us a piece of Americana our other resort properties don't have in this abundance."

Both said they are fiercely loyal and that translates into helping the communities they are

New owner Aaron Mumford looks over past owner Vicki Scotts letter she read saying goodbye and introducing the new owners.



The crowd at The Virginian says goodbye to the Scotts after Vicki's departure speech.



Vicki and Vernon Scott give each other a knowing look once they have passed the legacy of The Virginian to the new owners.



investing in.

"We know local relationships are important and you have to earn these relationships most of the time," Mumford said.

"That is exactly what we plan to do."

The party which was a farewell to the Scotts and an introduction to Baker and Mumford, had a lot of attendees. Vicki said she

felt the new owners were good people and she was glad the Scott family was turning it over to capable and caring owners.

The Pearl of the Plains deserves no less.