

LAW & GOVERNMENT

Lessing's wins Bethpage State Park catering contract

By CLAUDE SOLNIK

After 20 years, two U.S. Opens and two Barclays golf tournaments, Steve Carl's Carlyle Catering is being replaced by Lessing's as the operator of the high-profile catering facility at Bethpage State Park.

Carl, owner of Carlyle Catering and operator of Carlyle on the Green as well as six other facilities, confirmed that Lessing's won the contract after the New York State Department of Parks put the location up for bid after the contract expired.

Lessing's had operated the location before Carl won the contract in 1998, with the beautiful backdrop of Bethpage State Park, and invested heavily in the facility, which became known as one of the region's premiere catering venues.

"I came here, put in a \$10 million renovation and spent 20 years here," Carl told LJB. "The contract came up for rebid and they decided to go with Lessing's, who had been in the place 20 years ago."

Calls to Lessing's and the New York State Department of Parks early Monday evening weren't returned, but Carl confirmed that the state had opted for Lessing's as the new operator of the venue.

Carl said that over 20 years, his firm had grown to include numerous other locations, including Carlyle at the Palace in Plainview, and more recently was granted the contract to operate the cohesions at both sides of Tobay Beach.

"I'm redoing that. I've got other projects," he said of the Tobay operation. "My company has grown tremendously. Today, it's [Bethpage State Park] a small piece of the operation. I have two new catering facilities."

He said that in November, his firm would unveil one new location and in De-



Carlyle on the Green/Facebook

CARLYLE ON THE GREEN: The venue is slated to change hands in 2018.

ember, it expected to unveil a second as his business continues to grow.

"We decided which direction we wanted to go. The state decided they had a different person to run their operation," Carl continued of the location at 99 Quaker Meeting House Rd. in the 1,500-acre park, in Farmingdale. "I wish them all the best."

Great River-based Lessing's operates numerous restaurants such as Finnegan's, the Library Café, Restaurant Mirabelle, Mirabelle Tavern, Maxwell's and the Post Office Café and caters at many other facilities.

Lessing's, founded in 1890, grew slowly for many years, but from 1980 to 2015 expanded from less than \$4 million in sales to more than \$70 million, Lessing's Presi-

dent Michael Lessing told LIBN earlier.

"I worked in the business as all of our family did throughout the summer, went to school for finance, started at Bethpage State Park in 1984 as a steward and never left," Lessing told LIBN. "I was responsible for managing the orders. Steve Carl came in after us."

Carl said he was working out details in terms of how to transition the location to its new operator in 2018, but said the exact date wasn't yet clear when it would change hands.

"If someone owns a building, they have a right to put out a lease. At the end of the lease, they can release it if they want," Carl said. "I took a broken down building

and made it into an amazing opportunity. A lot of people who wouldn't look at it 20 years ago look at it now."

Although Carl has numerous locations, he has obtained some of his biggest contracts under Republican-led administrations.

Carl won the contract for Bethpage State Park in 1998 under Gov. George Pataki, a Republican. He later partnered with Donald Trump to open Trump On The Ocean at Jones Beach, which ran into red tape and never opened.

He recently reached a deal to operate a restaurant in Tobay Beach in the Town of Oyster Bay, which is controlled by Republicans.

"My life's about building and developing. I have new things on the horizon," he said, noting he has expanded his business, while developing a reputation as an accomplished restaurateur. "Twenty years in any one location is a good time. I did great stuff. I got a bunch of new things happening. I'm proud of what I've done and of the good things going on in my life."

Carl won't be handling another U.S. Open before he turns over the location to its new owners. But he's planning a major event at Bethpage State Park.

"I'm getting married at Bethpage next month. Bethpage has been good," he said. "If you're a landlord and you have the building and all of a sudden someone comes into your place and builds a tremendous business, it becomes a very valuable property. Everybody takes a look at it. Obviously, certain people think the value they can pay for it is more than I would want to."

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