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What's next for former Isabela on Grandview site

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When Melanie and Jim Guzzo bought the property where Isabela on Grandview was once located, it was a homecoming for the Silicon Valley-based couple, who both grew up in southwestern Pennsylvania.

"Silicon Valley has wonderful things to offer, but it just doesn't feel like home," Melanie Guzzo said. "We've always wanted to get back here, and it was just sort of on a fluke that we found Isabela. We were driving up through here and saw it and said, 'wow!'"

The couple closed on the Mount Washington property a little more than a week ago for \$510,000. It has previously housed Isabela on Grandview, a fine dining institution that closed last summer after owner George Merrick could no longer dedicate himself to the restaurant's operation due to family health issues.

While recently focused on raising her children, Guzzo is a tech industry professional originally from Johnstown. Her husband Jim is a Moon Township native who works for Intel. The couple have lived in California for about 25 years, but have been thinking of returning to the region and have a son who currently attends Penn State University.

Guzzo said the couple is considering the possibility of establishing a

hospitality-related venture in the restaurant building. This would operate for seven or eight years while the couple continues to live in California. Eventually, they hope to fully move back to the region and convert the cliff-side property with its sweeping city views into a new residence for themselves.

Along with investing in some basic renovations, Guzzo said they're considering using the building to rent out for various hospitality events, such as wedding receptions and birthday parties, or bringing in a restaurateur to run a restaurant in the building.

"I've been out of the business world for way too long, and I'm excited about getting involved again," Guzzo said.

Terri Sokoloff, a principal of Specialty Group, which represented the seller in the sale, noted that while Isabela was long one of the region's top restaurants, the 2,730-square-foot property does present some options that include a neighboring 60-foot plot for potential expansion.

She added she also has the restaurant's liquor license available for the new owners if they decide they need it.

Merrick, now 82, said he's happy with the new ownership as he makes the personal transition out of the restaurant business.

"I've enjoyed my years with Isabela, and all the wonderful friends that I met," he said. "We ended up on top, and that's a good way to end."

Tim Schooley

Reporter

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