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Issue No. 8 Celebrating Local Foods, Season By Season *Winter 2011*

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CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS

Founder's vision leaves legacy of love in Cedar Falls

By Nancy McKibben

Anne Castle single-mindedly pursued her dream of an inn in the Hocking Hills, but her real legacy rests in her ability to draw people in and make them part of her vision.

The first summer, she slept on the porch. The first winter, the wind scraped through the holes in the walls, the pipes froze and the nearest neighbor was miles away. How had 53-year-old Anne Castle come to be living in an old log cabin in the Hocking Hills?

*"She was the very hardest-working woman I ever met."
—Terry Lingo*

Anne had never been shy about reinventing herself. A Bexley wife and mother, she received her degree in social work in her 40s and opened her own successful business: Options Adult Career Counseling. In her corporate pre-retirement planning sessions, she challenged people to pursue their dreams. "My dream has always been to own an inn," she told her clients.

After her 1983 divorce, she moved to German Village and began actively researching bed & breakfasts all over New England before deciding that Hocking Hills, where she often went day tripping, was just as scenic. She purchased a piece of

property surrounded on three sides by Hocking Hills State Park, with Cedar Falls and Old Man's Cave just minutes away, and here she created the Inn & Spa at Cedar Falls.

Private contractor Terry Lingo recalls surveying the property with Anne.

"I told my parents that night that I had met a truly crazy woman," Terry recalls. "There was just a little cabin and a hand-dug well out front, on a one-lane gravel road, and this woman told me she was gonna build an inn. And I thought: Who the hell is going to want to come to Hocking County?"

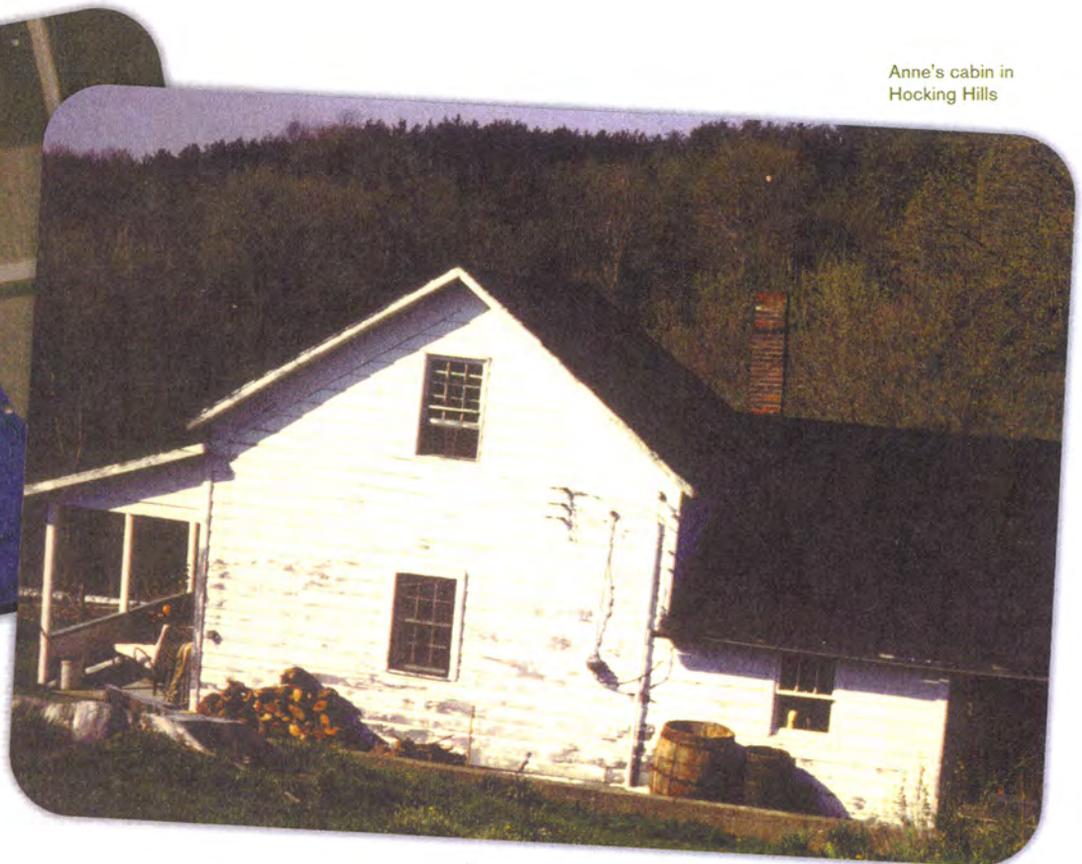
It was 1985. Anne was an inexperienced single woman in her 50s with no credit history. No bank would loan her money. She hired Terry to convert the cabin into a kitchen and dining area and paid him through her consulting business, but every time the money ran out, he had to pull his crew to work elsewhere until she could pay him again.

"I knew she would be successful. She knew exactly what she wanted and was very committed to seeing it happen. Anne was a visionary."—Melody Borchers

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELLEN GRIMSFIELDER



Anne Castle
outside her cabin



Anne's cabin in
Hocking Hills

Hoping for an SBA loan, Anne contacted Melody Borchers, the manager of the Women's Business Resource Program for the Ohio Department of Development from 1985 to 1998. The state would not fund working capital, but Melody directed Anne to the Ohio tourism department.

"I believed in Anne from the get-go," says Melody, today a small business consultant. "Long before the facility was ready, she put up a beautiful rustic sign at the cabin saying that the Inn would be open the following spring and then built a database of interested people. To her, it was a done deal."

Anne's unrelenting faith in her own vision inspired friends and supporters to invest in the Inn in lieu of traditional loans. Eventually, Bank One in Athens approved a loan to complete the project, including the Inn with its nine guest rooms—designed and built by Terry.

Anne's daughter Lisa, an attorney, provided legal help, and daughter, Pat, good with numbers, became a member of the advisory board. Her third daughter, Ellen Grinsfelder, moved to Hocking Hills and ran the Inn with her mother.

"We didn't have any money for marketing," Ellen says, "so we invited travel and food editors. We sent the travel editors big posters of Cedar Falls and the food editors jars of cranberry and blueberry chutney."

In the meantime, Ellen and Terry had fallen in love. Their first child, Sarah, was an infant when one Sunday afternoon shortly before opening day, the couple was startled to find a stranger peering in their cabin window. The *Columbus Dispatch* had published an article about Anne and the Inn, and more than 100 visitors arrived that very afternoon. Suddenly, Anne's crazy idea was a success.

"She was a great mom and a super business partner. I lost a true friend when she died."—Ellen Grinsfelder

Until her death from cancer in 1991, Anne was a magnet who drew people to the Inn. "She was such a mentor to people," says Terry.

Anne also had a genius for attracting volunteer help. "Like Tom Sawyer painting his fence," Terry smiles at the memory. "She had tons of friends who would come and help her out."

Ellen and Anne were a good team. They did mother/daughter workshops in addition to the ones that Anne conducted on her own in the serenity of the Inn's woodland setting.

"People flocked here because of my mother," Ellen says. "She gave people a sense of community. Even with dying, she was a pioneer. She did workshops on a positive approach to death and dying, and we've published the journal that she kept. She was a very spiritually based person."

After Anne's funeral, the Inn closed for a day so that hundreds whom she had inspired could come and celebrate her life. The

next day, Ellen asked herself: "With my mother gone, can we continue to succeed?"

The answer was a resounding yes. "But we were still undercapitalized," Ellen says. "There were times we didn't take a paycheck."

Terry continued as a contractor, and also handled all the Inn's building and maintenance. Ellen welcomed guests, cleaned and decorated, promoted Hocking Hills tourism and planned the Inn's expansion.

Daughter Sarah and son Ben remember Inn staff who became like family; Christmas decorating parties for the Inn; and lots of practical lessons in running a small business.

"I love meeting people that used to know Gram. The stories are always the same ... that Gram was a little 'crazy' when she first started the Inn (all she had was a dream and no money) but that Gram was a truly inspiring woman."—Sarah Lingo

Next year, the Inn and Spa at Cedar Falls celebrates its 25th anniversary with 12 new cottages, five cabins and a spa, all designed and built by Terry. The gourmet restaurant, something that Anne insisted on from the start, continues to attract outside diners as well as Inn guests under Chef Anthony Schulz.

The latest endeavor is The Gathering Place, a green-certified corporate retreat with a rooftop garden. "Anne would have been so excited about it," Terry says. "She loved her flowers and vegetables."

Ellen considers the journey that began with Anne Castle's dream of an inn.

"We've learned to live each day to its fullest," she says. "Our goal is to welcome people and take care of them to the best of our ability—so they leave feeling loved, refreshed, rejuvenated and with smiles on their faces. I have no doubt that my mother is up there, smiling down and proud of what we've accomplished."

The Inn & Spa at Cedar Falls

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The restaurant is open to outside diners for lunch and dinner.
Please phone ahead for dinner reservations.



Nancy McKibben has been writing and eating for years, and is happy to combine those loves with the opportunity to advocate for local food in the pages of *Edible Columbus*. Her novel *The Chaos Protocol* was a finalist for the Ohioana Book Award for Fiction in 2000, and she was the winner of the Thurber House Essay Contest in 2003. She is also a lyricist and journalist, the mother of six and the wife of one. View her work at leader.com/nancymckibben; contact her at nmckibben@leader.com.