

GREEN *from A8*

next 17 years. Casey said his father was able to reach the hotels' highest occupancy rate for the hotel in 1968, a year which also saw around 40 statewide conventions come through the facility. "In some ways, I really think that was kind of the high-water mark," he said. By 1971, it had won the Five-Star Award for seven consecutive years from Mobil Travel Guide. It was the first time a hotel had won the top rating seven years in a row. It was also only one of three motels in the country receiving the award that year among 24,000.

Walter Woodard died that same year, living long enough to see his dream come true. Even after his passing, the award trend continued and, in its 14th consecutive year in 1978, The Village Green became the only motor hotel country to be honored so often. It was honored in a two-day event which made national news.

At the time, there were only 32 "Five-Star" hotels in the United States. For the five previous years, The Village Green and Salishan Lodge on the Oregon Coast had been the only motor hotels to receive the honor.

That same year, The Village Green also earned the American Automobile Association's "Five Diamond" award, effectively finding itself a top-rated facility in both gold standards of restaurant, hotel and resort ratings.

In 1977, it was listed among the country's top 11 resorts by *The Sunday Star* out of Honolulu.

Nothing lasts forever, though, and 1981 was the last year The Village Green received a five-star rating.

A few factors may have played into this.

For one, vacation travel was hampered by the oil crises of 1973 and 1979.

And by the 1980s, Casey noted, conventions had started looking for bigger venues than The Village Green offered. It was part of the reason the Woodard family built Eugene's Valley River Inn in 1973, a venue more capable of keeping up with market demand.

Also, the cost of maintaining a hotel at a five-star level was a heavy investment.

"I can tell you that the economy of scale of The Village Green never was conducive to being a profit center," said Casey. "It was successful, but it was not an economic powerhouse and it never really was a huge moneymaker."

Casey chalked it up to a business decision.

"And probably the right one, that, 'We won't cater to the five-star crowd. We'll cater to the four-star crowd,'" he said.

Besides its far-reaching fame, the motor hotel also had local impact.

When The Village Green first opened, it employed around 100 people and budgeted a \$500,000 payroll — money which would have trickled back into the community.

The Village Green is also to thank for the Cottage Grove State Airport across the street, though perhaps indirectly.

While the Woodards had purchased 30 acres from a family friend, this friend still owned a substantial plot of adjacent land which included a dairy farm. The tendency for strong, unpleasant farm odors to waft toward The Village Green made for a less than desirable atmosphere for esteemed guests.

Thus, Walter offered to swap with his friend some land farther north in Seginaw, relocating the dairy



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The Iron Maiden's removal caused such a stir among locals that it was eventually brought back.

farm and saving the air quality around the hotel.

Now owning this land which spanned along the Row River, Walter made it a gift to the State of Oregon. That gift would transform the property into the Cottage Grove State Airport.

As generous as the act was, establishing an airport in Cottage Grove also served the Woodards business interests. The taxiway at the airport allowed pilots to pull in just across the street from the hotel, bringing in a new brand of clientele.

By the early '80s, however, the Woodards began to feel much of the steam had evaporated from the endeavor.

"Changing times, competition and steady decline of tourists led my family to

sell the property in 1985," said Casey.

The buyer wasn't just the first person who came knocking, however. Casey recalled that Gordon Getty, son of oil tycoon J. Paul Getty, "would walk into my father's office once a summer and say, 'I want to buy this place.'"

For the first few years, Getty was told the property was not for sale. However, an agreement was finally made and The Village Green changed ownership to the Zed Group, a division of the Getty empire, in 1986 for \$2.1 million.

"He really enjoyed the Oregon summers and he enjoyed the art scene in Eugene," Casey remembered of Getty.

Ownership later shifted to the Kims, a local couple,

before moving on to Dirk Winter, an owner of Moonstone Hotels out of Cambria, Calif., in 2001.

"It was initially my desire to bring back The Village Green as a prominent hospitality property in Cottage Grove," said Winter. "For many reasons we were never able to accomplish those goals."

The Village Green never did return to its glory days, however — something Casey pointed out is understandable as the hotel works best in the modern climate as quaint roadside motor hotel, not as an elegant, Old World establishment.

For all its national fame and acclaim and eventual fading into the background, the facility still holds a special place in the hearts of Cottage Grove locals.

Rumors of its sale and possible demolition have caused some upset on social media threads.

This isn't the first time Grovers have had an emotional reaction to change at The Village Green, though.

In the '80s, before the Woodards sold the property, the owners talked openly of turning it into a retirement community, stating that the motor hotel had lived past its prime.

"There were articles with people who were shocked and aghast that we would consider doing that," recalled Casey.

This plan was scrapped, but under the next regime of ownership, the community spoke out again when antiques from the

see LEGACY on A11



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