

European Elegance on Millionaires Row Local landmark celebrates double anniversary



By Kristiana Heap
Society Editor

Today the most exclusive addresses can be found on Beverly and Lakeside drives in Highland Park. One hundred years ago, the most sought-after locations in Dallas could be found a little south of Park Cities on Maple Avenue's Millionaires Row.

According to locals in the know, the gem of Maple Avenue is Hotel St. Germain, a restaurant and European-style boutique hotel owned by Claire Heymann. Heymann has a natural love of all things historical.

"It's very important to me," she said of the hotel. "I'm the daughter of an antiques dealer. My parents are both deceased, and they're in Paradise looking at me, saying, 'You better get that right.'"



Staff Photo: Lonnie Erickson
Claire Heymann, proprietor of the Hotel St. Germain

Hotel St. Germain, named for Heymann's French grandmother, Germaine, and for the patron saint of Paris, is about to celebrate a milestone, albeit a small milestone in its lengthy history. The hotel is preparing for its 15th anniversary and also is celebrating the fact that at least 100 years have passed since it was built.

Recently chosen as one of the best restaurants in America by Zagat Survey, the prix fixe menu offered by chef Chad Martin features eight courses of French fare. The hotel's restaurant is one of the only places in town that offers a candlelit dining experience accompanied by proper silver and Limoges china.

While the majority of hotels do most of their business during the week with out-of-town clients, Hotel St. Germain is different.

“For us, it’s locals on weekends,” Heymann said. “It’s a special, celebrative event location, particularly nowadays, where you have to go through a strip search to get on the airplanes. People can get into the car and glide down any one of the thoroughfares, and hopefully when they arrive, it’s like being in a different location,” Heymann said.

According to Heymann, local historian Frances James researched the origin of the hotel and traced it back to the early 1900s. Heymann said a captain in the Confederate Army named John Patrick Murphy constructed the building. Murphy’s daughter married into the Locke family, who owned it for about 50 years.

“It was important for me that the Locke family and certainly Mrs. Seybold have supported us,” Heymann said. Park Cities resident Adele “Nell” Seybold’s late husband, Eugene Murphy Locke, was the grandson of the home’s builder and lived in the house until he went away to college.



courtesy photo
The hotel has a large collection of Limoges china.

“I think it’s great,” Seybold said of the home’s latest incarnation. “It was a lovely family home for many years.”

Locke passed away before the home became a hotel.

“I think he would be very happy with what has been done,” Seybold said.

Heymann is proud to be responsible for the upkeep of a historical landmark. “There’s a picture of [the home] in 1915 or 1920 or so with a carriage house in the back,” she said. “The homes that were built on Maple Avenue, on Cedar Springs Road, on Mockingbird Lane — you would die. There were gigantic, beautiful homes that are now parking lots; it’s so sad.”

In honor of the hotel’s anniversaries, Heymann hosted a lavish eight-course wine dinner on Nov. 18, which she described as: “An evening of wine and food, and certainly in recognition of the community and the guests.”

In the past decade and a half, Heymann has helped plan elaborate engagements, escorted brides from dressing room to aisle, and celebrated milestones with her clientele, who are mostly from the Dallas community.

“Life is hard anytime,” Heymann said. “We may perceive it as a little scarier than it was 15 years ago. This is where people come as an escape.”

She has many fond memories of life at the hotel, but one stands out.

“One of the most touching things that comes to mind happened five or six years ago,” she said. “I was working the front desk on a Saturday night; it was probably 10 or 11. A gentleman I perceived as elderly came in dressed to the nines with a boutonniere, and a lady in her 70s followed him. Their honeymoon night had been paid for by their 50-year-old children.

“He said, ‘You know, life is really strange. I played in this attic 70 years ago with Eugene Locke.’

“And I said, ‘The room you’re staying in was the attic.’ It gave me chills. He took the hand of his little, new wife and went up for their honeymoon night in the attic,” Heymann said. “Everything is cyclical, and that was complete.”