

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF FORT WASHINGTON

473 Bethlehem Pike

Fort Washington, PA 19034

Press Release- March 14, 2007

The fate of the Fort Washington Hotel (formerly Marita's Cantina) has been uncertain since it was closed early last summer by Whitemarsh Township as it was deemed uninhabitable for occupation. The situation was compounded by the fact that the historic 1855 structure was for sale and the current owner was reluctant to stabilize the edifice prior to selling the asset. Whitemarsh Township officials were fearful that heavy snow would create public safety issues forcing the demolition of the hotel. Last week the property was sold to John and Sharon Eichenlaub. John is a local developer who has pledged to stabilize, restore and upgrade the hotel. By stepping forward and undertaking this project, Mr. Eichenlaub will return the most important building in historic Fort Washington Village to service. It will serve as the economic stimulus for a commercial stretch of Bethlehem Pike that maintains its Victorian charm.

Whitemarsh Township should be commended for their extraordinary efforts to preserve the structure. Had the township not interceded, the building would have continued to deteriorate to the point where restoration would not have been economically feasible for any interested party. The Whitemarsh Township officials, specifically Assistant Township Manager Bruce Horrocks and Zoning Officer Elizabeth Cordova have been very accommodating. Most importantly the efforts of Fire Marshall/Code Enforcement Officer Calvin Bonenberger resulted in the sale of the building to its new owners. The required steps to purchase the property within the short time frame could not have been accomplished without his total cooperation. Coupled with the township's role in preserving the 1902 train station, preservation of the historic integrity of Fort Washington Village has been greatly advanced.

The effort to save the hotel from demolition was aided by The Historical Society of Fort Washington, The Conservancy of Montgomery County, Fort Washington Rescape, and The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. These organizations promoted the sale of the hotel, provided experts to evaluate the structure, and encouraged those involved parties to resolve the situation either with the needed repairs being made or the sale of the building to an owner committed to the preservation of the building.

John Eichenlaub has been a local developer for many years in the area. As an experienced builder and a local citizen, the hotel has passed into capable hands. While the plans for the building are not complete the interior will most likely be used for office space.