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Despite a change of ownership at the Hedges Inn, Carol Schnittlich, the general manager, has remained, as have all of her staff. *Carissa Katz*

## New Owner, Same Smiles at Hedges Inn

BY CARISSA KATZ

From the outside, the changes to the historic Hedges Inn on East Hampton's James Lane are barely noticeable. A fresh coat of paint. A new picket fence. A new sign with different lettering.

Returning customers would have no trouble recognizing the place outside or in, but to Carol Schnittlich, the general manager of the inn before and after its sale last February, the improvements make a world of difference.

For starters, she said Monday, "we don't have things breaking down anymore." After purchasing the inn this winter from the Palm Management Corporation, Hedges Inn L.L.C. completely renovated and refurbished it with the help of the builder Pat Trunzo Sr. of Wainscott and the decorators Christina Zacharia and Suzanne Rogers, who have an office in Sag Harbor. "They did a fabulous job," the manager said. Work began on April 15 and by June 15, the inn was reopened for business.

Painted fireplaces had been stripped down to the original wood, floors and walls were refinished. "It was restored back to the way it was," Ms. Schnittlich said. "Everything is new."

The Palm Management Corporation, which owns the Palm restaurant and the Hunting Inn on Main Street, purchased the inn in a bank auction in 1986. By last year, when it was put on the market, "it was at a crossroads where either they were going to put a lot of money into it or sell it to someone who would fix it up," she said.

"It was always kind of the unloved stepchild at the end of the street," Ms. Schnittlich said of the Hedges Inn's relationship to the Hunting Inn.

The principal of Hedges Inn L.L.C., who prefers to remain behind the scenes and unnamed, was willing to spend the money to update the inn the right way. "He's a real hands-on person," Ms. Schnittlich said. "He's no-

nonsense and very nice."

Ms. Schnittlich, who had been the general manager of the inn for five years under its Palm ownership, remembers that when it sold, she said to the new owner, "Take care of my baby." And not long after that, she decided to inquire about keeping her position under the new ownership.

"It was the right move for me, and my heart was here," she said. "I think I might have lived in this house once." She recalled the first time she came to the inn, when applying for a job with the Palm Management Corporation. "I said, 'I've been here before.'" She hadn't, but something about the place spoke to her. She lives year round in an apartment at the inn. "I know all the quirks."

Ms. Schnittlich was not the only Hedges Inn staff member to stay on after the new owner bought the place. Her assistant manager, Rose Marie Curreri, two office assistants, and four housecleaners all made the move with her, providing a lot of continuity.

Asked what sets the Hedges Inn apart from the other inns and hotels in the area, the manager was quick to answer. "I think it's the care we take. . . . It's very much like home. . . . It's the care and the smiling faces and the sincere welcome. And we mean it. It comes naturally to me. It's what I'm good at." Before coming to the Hedges in 2002, Ms. Schnittlich was a smiling face greeting customers at Mango's, a beachfront restaurant on the Caribbean island of Anguilla.

The Hedges Inn, directly across from the traffic light at Woods Lane and East Hampton's Main Street, is almost impossible to miss as you enter East Hampton. In fact, many drivers over the years have literally barely missed the place, barreling across the patch of green behind the light, over James Lane, and straight through the inn's picket fence.

But that is just a small part of the inn's

long and fascinating history. Built in 1770, it was home to generations of the Hedges family before becoming a boarding house in 1870. For several years in the mid-to-late 1950s, the inn was owned by Henri Soule, whose Le Pavillon in New York helped launch the career of the chef Pierre Franey. In the summertime, the Hedges Inn was an East Hampton outpost of Le Pavillon, with Mr. Franey presiding over the kitchen.

The restaurant, which was most recently the James Lane Cafe, is closed for the time being, but Ms. Schnittlich said Monday that there is a good possibility that the restaurant will be reopened in the future.

For now, the bar and dining room cater only to guests, who get an extensive continental breakfast in the morning and complimentary wine, lemonade, and snacks in the afternoon.

The inn has 12 rooms, each with a private bath, wireless Internet access, and flat-panel television. There are East Hampton Village and Town beach parking passes for every room. On Monday, the inn was alive with the sound of children's voices. Young models for Ralph Lauren Polo's children's line, in residence with their parents, were busy being fitted for clothing for a photo shoot on Tuesday.

"We're children-friendly," Ms. Schnittlich said with a smile.

"It's been a fabulous summer, better than expected, and we only just started to advertise. . . . Most of our customers have come by word of mouth." The clientele this summer has included some return customers, new customers from New York, and many Europeans.

This year, for the first time in three years, the inn will be open all year. "It's going to be beautiful for the holidays," Ms. Schnittlich promised.