



Wine and Lady Bugs

BY TOM FINAN

The Penn Club's 13-story clubhouse contains elegant dining rooms and banquet space to accommodate the club's over 7,000 members.

All photos courtesy of the Penn Club

The Penn Club is one of the newest “old” clubs in New York City. Founded in 1886 at a dinner at Delmonico’s, it was the first local Penn alumni group outside of Philadelphia. For the first 98 years of its history the Penn Club led a gypsy existence. Members focused on an annual banquet and the presentation of the Benjamin Franklin Cup (named after the founder of Penn), which didn’t leave much energy for rallying support for a permanent home.

Over the years, the Penn Club of New York served alumni, faculty, and students from a variety of facilities that were rented, leased, and shared with other clubs.

Even without a clubhouse to call its own, the Penn Club remained true to its mission.

The advertisement for a Penn Club banquet in 1915

included the following statement of purpose: "The best interests of our University demand it shall have in the great city of New York a club, which will equal in dignity, character, equipment, and service the clubs of other great universities. Apart from any questions of sentiment and affection for our Alma Mater, the establishment of such a club will give to each of its members a rallying center, a home, furnishing all the accommodations of a first class hotel to those sojourning in New York, with such surroundings that no one will ever feel that he is stranger in a strange land."

Finally, in 1989, a building at 30



The Penn Club of New York doesn't have a sign over the entrance reading, "Through these doors walk a lot of really smart people who like to have fun," but it ought to.

West 44th St. was purchased by the university, which owns the building with the club as tenant. Construction of the clubhouse kicked off on April 16, 1992. More than 7,000 alumni and friends joined as charter members by June 15, 1994, the day The Penn Club officially opened its doors. The club held a gala celebration in 2004, to celebrate the success of the new clubhouse. It included the recovery of the Benjamin Franklin Cup, which had languished in the attic of the widow of the cup's last recipient for half a century.

The 13-story clubhouse includes banquet space, meeting

Professor David Eisenhower, grandson of the late President Dwight Eisenhower, addressed Penn Club members at a sold out event after receiving the annual Provost's Award for Excellence in University Teaching in 2003.

rooms, dining rooms, overnight guest rooms, a library, fitness center, spa, and business center. The overnight guest rooms boast Penn tradition while providing both privacy and comfort. The foyers and rooms on the five guest floors feature mahogany furniture, brass fittings, and fine fabrics. Each floor encompasses a different theme at Penn. The ninth floor salutes campus student activities, while the eighth floor honors Penn firsts, such as the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. The seventh floor is a tribute to the accom-

plishments of Penn alumni in politics and government. The sixth floor honors the numerous Penn students, alumni, and coaches who have participated in the Olympic Games, and the fifth floor recognizes the achievements of Penn alumni in various professions.

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Vintage Penn

Today's Penn Club of New York prides itself on being "a home away from home in New York City" for Penn Alums and faculty and their families and guests. Peter Homberg, CCM, who has been general manager of the "new" Penn club since a year after

the clubhouse opened, works with his staff to not only make the club "homey" for local and visiting members, but to give them plenty of reasons to keep coming back. The management, staff, and committees of the Penn Club do this with an eclectic mixture of banquets and events that almost always manage to combine "brainy" and "fun."

In February, for example, the club offered as its monthly wine dinner a program featuring the whimsical duo of wine historian Dr. Patrick McGovern and the fire-

ball organic winemaker Maureen Lolonis.

Dr. McGovern presented insights into the origins of wine in culture gained in almost 25 years of work since earning his doctorate at Penn in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies: Near Eastern archeology and languages. He has been a pioneer in bio-molecular archeology — the intersection of science down to the DNA level with the humanities.

The best illustration of this discipline has been the study of food and wine in ancient cultures. McGovern has actually taken ancient pottery vessels and found traces of

yeast and grapes that indicated that the containers had been used for fermenting wine. His research includes seminal work establishing the earliest origins of wine some 6,000 years ago. In 2003, Dr. McGovern published the book *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture*.

Maureen Lolonis represents the latest generation of a family that pioneered organic winemaking. The Lolonis wine dynasty was founded in Redwood Valley, CA in 1914 by Greek immigrant George Lolonis. In the 1950s, George's son Nick became a pioneer in organic viniculture. To keep pests away, beneficial predators (ladybugs) were released in the vineyards. Today, over five million ladybugs are released in the vineyards every June, July, and August. In addition, cover crops were employed to aid in keeping pests from the vines and in returning nutrients to the soil.

In 1982, after many years of selling grapes to other wineries, and with an enviable reputation for outstanding grapes, sons Petros and Ulysses established Lolonis Winery, putting a Greek family name on an American wine label for the first time.

The Penn Club coupled this appetizing presentation with a "Steak House" menu that included:

- Jumbo Shrimp Cocktail
- Cocktail Sauce with Brandy
- Lolonis Fume Blanc Redwood Valley 2003
- Pan Seared Crabcake
- Baby Greens and remoulade beurre blanc
- Lolonis Chardonnay Estate 2002
- Chargrilled Sliced Steak
- Traditional Steak house sides
- Lolonis Cabernet Sauvignon, Winegrowers Reserve 2001
- Buttersweet Chocolate Mousse with caramelized pineapple
- Lolonis Eugenia, Botrytis Chardonnay 1997

The dinner was a sellout. "Wine dinners at the Penn Club normally attract between 60 and 65 people. That's a full dining room in terms of the level of service we want to provide," GM Homberg said.

Calendar of Events

Coming up with programming

that meets the social, intellectual, and culinary expectations of Penn Club members is a collaborative effort. "It's a matter of constant brainstorming among staff, members, and the university," Homberg said. "The university has an outreach office in the club. They know people at the university and how to get them here. It's a very unique relationship. Our members also have a lot of contacts in the community, which allows us to bring in famous authors and other public figures."

The staff/member/university collaboration at the Penn Club produces a variety of events that is somewhat mind-boggling. Here's a sampling:

Special Events

David Eisenhower

The namesake for Camp David, Professor David Eisenhower is the grandson of the late President Dwight David Eisenhower and son-in-law of the late President Richard M. Nixon. Professor Eisenhower, winner of The University of Pennsylvania's annual Provost's Award for Excellence in University Teaching in 2003, addressed Penn Club members at a sold-out event.

Madeleine Albright

Penn Club members met the first foreign-born U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and first female Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, at this exclusive breakfast. She discussed her position as the highest-ranking woman in American history and the current state of world affairs. Members were lining out the door of the Penn Club awaiting her to autograph copies of her book, *Madame Secretary: A Memoir*.

Joseph E. Stiglitz

Joseph Stiglitz was awarded the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics. He was the chairman of President Clinton's Council on Economic Advisers, and later vice president and chief economist of the World Bank. Members were treated with his economic insights.

Career and Lifestyle Series

Etiquette and the Business Diner

Members literally devoured the subject matter, while learning that good manners are not only important in the home, but in the workplace, too.



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Career Placement 411

Experts were brought in to review members' résumés and provide mock interviews.

Getting Yourself Published

With a "real-life" literary agent at the lectern, members and guests learned both how to find an outlet for their literary efforts and what it takes to be a full-time author.

Women's Health — 35 and Beyond

Extremely informative for every woman who wants to know what happens to her body after 35. Strategies to prevent the onslaught of menopause and osteoporosis were discussed.

Life After 50

A panel discussion that focused on health, personal fulfillment, family, finances, and community for those members of this rapidly-increasing age group.

Business/Professional

The Entrepreneur's Toolbox Series

Past participants have included Oxygen Media, Iron Street Labs, the Let's Talk Business Network, and other successful startups.

Hedge Fund Panel

For eight years in a row, the

Penn Club has hosted a panel discussion featuring the "next generation" of hedge fund leaders.

Real Estate Panel

High-profile real estate gurus come together to discuss their career paths and choices they made to get to where they are today. Members get to ask questions and network with some of the top leaders in the real estate industry.

Gourmet Gallery

Masahur Morimoto — Iron Chef (formerly of Nobu).

Star of the Food Network's *Iron Chef*, he performed live at the Penn Club with Stephen Starr, one of Philadelphia's top restaurateurs.

Cooking Class with Penn Club's Chef Florimond Smoor

The Penn Club's executive chef used to be the executive chef at the famed Plaza Hotel.

Club Night

Similar to the Wine Dinner, Club Nights allow members to be seated together at large round tables so that they have a chance to mingle and get to know other members.

Abner's Philly Cheesesteaks

Diets and cholesterol counts were completely ignored as hundreds of members took a step back

in time at this all-you-can eat, dress-down affair in the main dining room.

Cultural

Art Tours

The club provided a professional guide for tours of galleries, artists' studios, and exhibits that have made Manhattan famous.

Book Group Luncheons

A professional book discussion leader presents attendees with a reading list that went a step beyond *The New York Times Book Review*, featuring titles such as *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett.

Theatre Evenings

After enjoying a pre-theatre dinner in the magnificent main dining room, members enjoy orchestra seats to some of Broadway's hottest shows such as *Mama Mia*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *Spamalot*.

The Spirit of Old Ben

Ben Franklin was concerned that while the framers of the Constitution had benefited from European education and culture, the new generation of Americans was sadly lacking in an appreciation and understanding of matters both intellectual and cultural. In 1749 he authored a pamphlet titled *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania (sic)*, in which he wrote:

"With the whole should be constantly inculcated and cultivated,



*Former New York Governor Mario Cuomo stopped by the Penn Club to sign copies of his book, *Why Lincoln Matters*. Lisa Aldisert, vice president at the Penn Club, is shown standing beside Cuomo.*

that Benignity of Mind which shows itself in searching for and seizing every Opportunity to serve and to oblige; and is the Foundation of what is called GOOD BREEDING; highly useful to the Possessor, and most agreeable to all.

"The Idea of what is true Merit, should also be often presented to Youth, explain'd and impress'd on their Minds, as consisting in an Inclination join'd with an Ability to

serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family; which Ability is (with the Blessing of God) to be acquir'd or greatly encreas'd by true Learning; and should indeed be the great Aim and End of all Learning."

Old Ben, who had a strong appreciation of intellectual discourse, good food, and fine wine, would have felt right at home at the Penn Club New York. ❧

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