

Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge By Dennis Powers

Don Callahan grew up in the Rogue Valley and dreamed of owning a lodge in the Siskiyou Mountains. The dream seemed near impossible, given that his prime assets were a flock of sheep. When property became available midway up Highway 99 on the mountain in 1944, Don gambled by selling the sheep and buying the land. When his World War II service ended, he enlisted his friends and with pick and shovels, they slowly carved out a building site from the solid rock hillside. He built a small, wood and stone building which he named, "Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge."

Although the dining room contained only eight stools and five tables, he optimistically opened for business in 1947. The rustic lodge and alpine location were a draw for the locals, and then the interstate travelers who were driving on Highway 99 as the Interstate freeway had not yet been constructed. Four years later, Don married Nilde Cervellin, an immigrant from Italy, and she started bringing in the Italian dishes that are still part of the offering.

The food, setting, and service had guests standing in line, especially with the small size of the dining room, but it did offer later a few rooms for tired travelers. When Interstate-5 was being constructed in 1964, the Callahan site was in the right-of-way. They used the moneys from the condemnation to buy a larger piece of land a short distance up Old Highway 99, below the Siskiyou summit and just off Exit 6 from I-5. They reopened in July 1965, and the site is actually a part of the old village of Siskiyou--which rose during the railroad pass and tunnel building in 1887, but then slipped over time into oblivion.

The operations continued to be a success. Ron and Donna Bergquist in 1996 bought the lodge and business. Ron had remodeled Nilde's kitchen in 1960 (he drew up the plans and some of construction) and had grown up in Eagle Point. He later founded the Shari's chain, built the first 34 restaurants, along with building 10 other restaurants that included the Rogue Regency Inn in Medford and the Boston Shaft in Yreka.

With his extensive experience in developing restaurants and hotels--and Donna's background in marketing, promotion, and advertising--they boosted the "Callahan tradition." The two added twelve rooms to the lodge, extensively remodeled, added a lobby with a log staircase, and worked to increase the lodge's recognition.

This came to a screeching halt when a September 2, 2006, fire burned the facilities into rubble. An employee had turned on an open-flame burner too high and left it unattended; the flame ignited accumulated grease in the hood; the hood's extinguisher system failed; and the sprinklers couldn't contain the blaze. Although no one was injured, the lodge was a total loss when firemen arrived.

The Bergquists decided to rebuild--and did this well. They matched the rough-hewn timbers, double-sided stone fireplace, and rustic interior that were so well liked. An elevator, wine cellar, and additional guest rooms were added, along with rebuilding a

spacious lobby, its own fireplace, and the log staircase. Although the main dining room had less seats, the patio's seating capacity more than doubled, along with another 150-seat banquet room being added. A new water system minimized the risk of another destructive fire.

They reopened for business in 2008 with 19 rooms with views from lawn and a waterfall to a fourth-floor penthouse; all of the rooms have corner-set Jacuzzi-jet tubs and all but three have wood-burning fireplaces. Since the Bergquists own 65 acres in the area with the lodge property being zoned for up to 32 rooms, they can expand more at their choosing.

The two owner-couples of Callahan's have shown that a rural lodge can survive--and prosper--during any economic times or calamities. It's a far cry from the original five tables that were first in use.

Sources: Callahan's Mountain Lodge: The History of Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge," at [Callahan's History](#); Sarah Lemon, "Back with a flourish," *Mail Tribune*, July 30, 2008, at [New Facilities After Fire](#); David Preszler, "Ron Bergquist takes payment from restaurant patrons," *Mail Tribune*, April 21, 1999, at [Bergquist Background](#); See generally, "Callahan's Lodge," at [More on Callahan's](#).