

DAILY LOCAL NEWS

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Cracking The Whip Wins the Race

BY TERRY CONWAY

When the third leg of the Triple Crown goes off this evening, there may not be a better place in Chester County to take in the action than an out-of-the-way country pub in West Marlborough.

That's because The Whip Tavern, on Route 841, caters to the area's well-represented horse set that can analyze horse races like the Belmont Stakes with an insider's critical eye.

"Initially we just wanted a hangout for the horse crowd," said Kulp, of Highland. "Then we hired a fantastic chef and now we have people coming from 25-30 miles away. The success we've experienced — it's an amazing feeling."

The tavern offers a rustic look that's balanced with old-fashioned charm. The walls are a light mustard color and offset the dark wooden seats and paneling that stretches around the perimeter walls. Colorful prints sketch steeple chasers in flight and hounds on the hunt. Open fires, a game table

and hefty wooden beams add to the pub's ambiance. Dressed in rugby jerseys, the staff pulls pints of real ale and traditional cider, and serves diners a mix of English and continental fare. In less than a year, Chef Jason Ziglar's inventive dishes featuring fresh, local ingredients have built up quite a following.

Overhead, plasma televisions beam in horse racing, show jumping and soccer from around the globe. In season, Wednesdays are "Race Night," when visitors can enjoy a pint at the handsome wooden bar and strike up a conversation perhaps with a jockey, trainer, world-class equestrian, blacksmith, owners or breeders.

The Whip Tavern building dates back to the early 1900s when it housed a wagon wheel business, then later a blacksmith shop. It eventually evolved into a corner store and then neighborhood bar. Situated near the village of Doe Run, K.C. Kulp and Luke A. Allen bought the bar in April 2004. Kulp previously had sold Head Ski equipment to wholesale accounts on the East Coast, then was hired as a telecommunications analyst and stockbroker on Wall Street. After six years, and in the aftermath of 9/11, Kulp reevaluated his career path.

"When my wife Danielle and I were dating we came to the bar," recalled Kulp.



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“I told her I wanted to buy it. She thought I was insane. After leaving New York I felt I didn’t have much to lose. My partner and I knew the area needed a nice pub and if we didn’t do it someone else would. We stripped everything down to the cinder block walls. The interior was in very bad condition; the only thing that’s still original are the ceiling joists.”

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The partners assembled a team that included West Chester architects Archer & Buchanan and Conrad Somers Construction to create an authentic English pub. Renovations began in October 2004 and the doors opened June 27, 2005. Celebrating the region’s passion for horses, Kulp hired West Chester’s Eric Smith to produce their stylish logo — a riding whip in the shape of a “W.”

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“The Whip is very similar to pubs I’ve visited in Cheltenham, England. It used to be this nasty, old redneck place that kept shutting down,” said Hunter with a laugh.

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On a recent Wednesday evening, an older gentleman in a tweed cap was sipping Strongbow cider from a tankard. Les McNamar was reveling in his steeplechase



horse Java To Go’s victory that was being replayed on the pub’s televisions. Next to McNamar sat owner/jockey Michelle Hunter of Cochranville. Originally from North Yorkshire, England, eight years ago, Hunter took up steeplechase riding in the states. Her mount, Joe at Six, captured the Virginia Gold Cup in 2004. “It’s a great place for old friends to meet and to watch all the regional races from the previous weekend,” McNamar said. “The Whip is very similar to pubs I’ve visited in Cheltenham, England.”

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A few seats over, Xavier Aizpuru is watching himself on television as he pilots the first of his two jump winners at the Fair Hill Races. His pal Taffy

gestures at the screen and starts to critique the jockey’s post-race television interview. Aizpuru’s Spanish parents owned The Horse & Groom, a pub in the Cotswold region of England for 30 years.

“I grew up in this kind of business so I know what a special place it is,” noted Aizpuru. “The horse community is very close-knit, we all support each other. You’ll find me here once a week, might be more if it was closer.”

At the far corner Heidi White is talking about her 13-year-old bay thoroughbred, Northern Spy. Together they won the U. S. Equestrian CCI National Three Day Eventing Championship in early May. They’ll be competing at the World Championships in Aachen, Germany at the end of July.

“It’s a brilliant place to have a drink and a chat,” she said. “It’s a little bit like home, but then again it’s not home. The food is fantastic.”