

# The Inn at Walnut Bottom

## OFFERS A TASTE OF HISTORY

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Nestled in the heart of Maryland's Allegheny Mountains, Cumberland has hosted many a visitor passing through this city once known as the "Gateway to the West." The early passage once known as The National Road has since given way to Interstate 68, which winds its way through downtown Cumberland on its east-west journey. An abundance of church steeples and bridges, with hills looming beyond, gives the city a cozy, nostalgic appearance worthy of Currier & Ives.

The Inn at Walnut Bottom, a bed-and-breakfast conveniently located downtown just off I-68, offers an ideal setting for visitors to explore Cumberland's varied charms. Located on the city's oldest street, the Inn is a mini-vignette of historic Cumberland's Victorian flavor that consists of two adjoining buildings – the Cowden House displaying the classic symmetry of the Federal style and the Queen Anne Dent House adorned with gables and a whimsical turret on one corner. The current Dent house replaced the original log home built by George Dent, an early settler of Cumberland during the late 18th Century. Together, the two houses offer 12 rooms; five are located in the Dent House while the Cowden House has seven rooms.

The interior décor of the Inn could be described as traditional Americana with a distinctively Scandinavian flavor. Each individually decorated room features plush comforters, patterned wallpaper, tapestry rugs and antiques to welcome guests. Most have private bathrooms, complete with toiletries displaying the Inn's logo. Besides these traditional comforts, the Inn offers such modern amenities as air-conditioning, cable television and wireless Internet access. Guests can relax in a cozy parlor, where they'll find books on local history and culture, as well as a selection of board games. Watercolor paintings of local scenes by Alexis Lavine, a former resident of Cumberland, are hung throughout the Inn and offer a touch of refinement. It's a winning combination of old and new.

The Inn reflects the talents and tastes of owners Kirsten Hansen and Grant Irvin, who have owned the Inn since 1995. A new life beckoned when the couple found an ad for the Inn at Walnut Bottom in a bed and breakfast trade magazine. They purchased the Inn, along with an adjacent home for their family, and headed east from Battle Creek, Michigan, to embark on a new career.

Grant, a former hospital administrator, took on the task of updating the Inn. While attending Tulane University, he was inspired by the grand old homes of New Orleans and picked up home improvement skills along with an academic degree.



**Above (left to right): Daughter Marion and son Hans at home with parents Kirsten Hansen and Grant Irvin, enjoy the comfort of the Inn including Kirsten's baking. They live in the house next door that adjoins the Inn. Being Inn Keepers is a full time job for the entire family. Inset and Below: Kirsten with some of her homemade goodies.**



For Kirsten, a native of Denmark, the Inn provides an opportunity to indulge her passion for fine cooking. The Inn's guests can savor her delectable breakfasts at no extra charge in a charming dining room, where stone and brick walls painted white provide a backdrop to tables covered with cheerful cranberry and white gingham. Servers pour coffee from cranberry-colored pots that match the tablecloths.



The morning's feast — and it is a feast — begins with fresh fruit and an endless mug of coffee, accompanied by a basket of baked goodies that might include Raisin Buns with Lemon Glaze, Hazelnut-Raspberry Muffins, Popovers and Almond-Blueberry Coffeecake. And then it's time for the main course, perhaps Kirsten's signature dish, Crème Brûlée French Toast. Or maybe Baked Dutch Apple Pancake, Bacon and Potato Frittata or Blueberry Buckwheat Pancakes. If you prefer lighter fare, the Inn's staff is happy to accommodate.

"We love to bake," Kirsten says. "Everything is made from scratch." Her breakfasts, often featuring original recipes, have earned rave reviews from *The Washington Post* and *The Baltimore Sun*. Guests can purchase bags of her special spiced granola to enjoy at home.

Upon request, Kirsten offers another treat for guests; she is a massage therapist with 21 years of experience in the Danish technique of *Afspaending*, translated as "unbuckling." *Afspaending* includes localized massage techniques, gentle stretches and relaxation exercises to release tension and improve the functioning of the body and mind. Kirsten shares her skills by teaching a body mechanics class to massage therapy students at Allegany College of Maryland and is

a member of Wellness Friends, a group of local women working to promote the healing arts that each practices.

It was during her massage training in Denmark that Kirsten met her future husband. While taking a break from exams, she visited a Matisse exhibit at a museum in Copenhagen, where she met Grant, an American tourist on vacation. A trans-Atlantic courtship soon followed with "high telephone bills," Kirsten says. She came to the United States in 1986 to join Grant, and the couple took up residence in Arlington, Virginia, where she began to work with area neurologists, rheumatologists and chiropractors while adjusting to life in the U.S.A. Grant's job soon took the couple to other cities, and after their children Hans and Marion were born, Kirsten devoted her energies to raising her family and honing her culinary skills with the help of a subscription to *Gourmet* magazine.

In her spare time, Kirsten has become an avid student of local and United States history. She likes to point out a



Kirsten bakes the old fashioned way, no ready made mixes or substituting ingredients. Everything is fresh and made with quality ingredients that take longer to prepare, but the outcome is delicious.

Facing page inset: Kirsten takes a break to enjoy one of the many easily accessible bike trails near the Inn.

framed letter displayed in the dining room that was written by former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant to Frederick Dent, whose daughter Julia was Grant's wife. The President wrote to his father-in-law while traveling west through Cumberland, and commented, "I passed your old homestead on my way through." Both Julia and Frederick were born in the old log house where the Dent House now stands, and Frederick passed away in the White House at the age of 89.

"We feel liberated from the rat race," Kirsten says with a smile. "The Inn is a fabulous place to raise a family," she adds, citing the Inn's relative proximity to major cities, easy access to transportation by car or train, and location within walking distance to Cumberland attractions.

Grant and Kirsten take pride in serving the varied needs of travelers, whether coming for a family reunion, a bike trip on the nearby C&O Canal Towpath, a corporate retreat or a romantic getaway. The Inn provides garage space for bikes and offers loaners to interested guests. Other attractions include the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, local museums and galleries, several state parks and nearby ski areas. Grant and Kirsten are happy to act as concierges to help guests make the most of their visit to Cumberland.

"People really enjoy the ability to settle in and walk downtown to check out the local shops and restaurants," Kirsten says. She notes the positive impact of artists who have moved into the area and helped revive the downtown area.

"I love what the Inn has given us," Kirsten says. "It's a lifestyle that has enabled us to be with our children, and we have met people from all over the world."

More than 200 years ago, the name Walnut Bottom described the tract of land selected by colonial settlers for the establishment of a town that became Cumberland. And now the Inn that bears that name offers warm hospitality to visitors and a rewarding life for Grant, Kirsten and their children.

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