Souvenir from Bill Green's

Casino and Terraced Gardens in Pittsburgh

by Richard Todd Rolinski

Historical Society Intern
Before the crowds flocked to Burgettstown and the Post-Gazette Pavilion, Pittsburghers danced the summer nights away under the stars at a little roadhouse just off Route 51 in Pleasant Hills.

“All Roads Lead to Bill Green’s”—or so says an invitation from 1939, when Bill and his famous Terraced Garden opened for its sixth season. Green’s casino sat right off the Route 51 cloverleaf at Lebanon Church Road, and by the 1930s, Pittsburghers were well-acquainted with the joy of the motorcar and packing the house at the nightclub.

Ever since the charming and jovial Mr. Green had begun with a small barbecue stand in 1930, his summers were filled with music and happy patrons. He added the Terraced Garden in 1934. It was one of those terrific and flamboyant ideas of a disappeared era, where couples in the “college set,” among others,
danced on a hardwood floor under a cover of shimmering summer stars, while Kaye Kysor or Lawrence Welk or someone else who would become a big star entertained (such as Louis Armstrong, Tex Beneke, and Rudy Vallee.) Comedian Don Knotts, who would go on to TV "Mayberry" fame as Barney Fife, began his stand-up comedy career there. (See "Biography" in this issue.)

Bill Green was not only famous for his hospitality, but for his sense of community. (He paid to send 20,000 packs of Chesterfields to overseas servicemen during World War II.) Green was also a shrewd businessman. When the era of Big Bands and open-air nightclubs faded, he replaced the venerable Terraced Garden first with a summer theater, then with a social hall for catered events, and finally, in 1952, with the Bill Green Shopping Center.

The shopping center persists to this day. But a few old-time hipsters still recall slowly gliding over polished hardwood under a cover of summer stars, while some young upstart named Sammy Kaye cools the humid air with a tune from when love was young.
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And it all began here — another example of the achievements and quality of life in Pittsburgh, then and now.

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SOME BILL GREEN TRIVIA: Sammy Kaye, whose orchestra became world-famous, made his debut at Bill Green’s in 1936. He and Green were golf buddies and the deal was cast on the links. Lawrence Welk, who also got his break at Green’s before moving to the William Penn Hotel, planned to market his band through a “Musical Meal” to be served exclusively at Green’s. The main course was called the “Squeezeburger” after Welk’s accordion virtuosity. Green’s redesigned Casino was featured in the February 1949 edition of The Charette, the Pittsburgh journal of architecture. Green joined the U.S. Navy in 1944 and left the running of the business to his wife Mary and her sister-in-law. The President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was invited to the 10th Anniversary of the opening of the nightclub in summer of 1940. An aide politely declined. Bill Green bought the J.J. Gumberg Commercial Real Estate Co. and changed the name to the Bill Green Co. Bill Green was an organizer and president of the Pittsburgh Nightclub Owner’s Association. Lillian Gish, star of many silent and classic films, played the title role in a production of “Miss Mabel” at the Arena Theater in 1951. In 1978, the South Hills Country Club held a “Bill Green’s Revisited Party,” complete with music by old house band-leader Tommy Carlyn and “His Take It Easy Tempos.” The invitations were an exact reproduction of Terraced Garden stationary and featured the old phone number (McKeesport 27993-4) and the trademark “Dancing Under the Stars.”
NITE LIFE

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at “Pittsburgh’s High Spot of Nite Spots”

BILL GREEN’S
Terraced Gardens
ROUTE 51 at the Cloverleaf Res. CA. 1111

BILL GREEN’S
Yes indeed, the band you
look for, will be back again for two weeks, as
other than your favorite, the
Carlyn outfit. This unit is
rhythm for your dancing p

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