CFA Museum Report of the Al. Ringling Museum Mansion

I'm Donald Horowitz. I co-own the Al. Ringling Museum Mansion in Baraboo WI

with Joe and Carmen Colossa, former employees with the Ringling Blue Unit. Joe was trainmaster and Carmen road a motorcycle in the globe act. Joe is also a CFA member.

We are in our second year owning the mansion. Al Ringling built his home in 1905 and lived there until his death in 1916. Since the 1930's it’s been home to the local Elks Club. In the 1950's they added a ballroom. As a tribute to Al’s wife, Eliza, known as “Lou” to her family and friends, we have named the space The Lou Ringling Ballroom. It can accommodate 300 people for any sit-down event.

Joe and Carmen oversee the day-to-day operations. During Baraboo's summer season the mansion is open for tours, which last for approximately one hour. During the tour the guests are led through Al's library, Lou's sitting room, the formal dining room, Al's billiard room, the kitchen and ballroom. Upstairs they tour Al's bedroom, Lou's bedroom and two additional bedrooms. The servant’s quarters are not on the tour, being that they are currently Joe and Carmen's private living space.

A couple nights a week we do ghost tours which last an hour and a half and have become quite popular. The architecture, size of the mansion and the fact that the mansion is 110 years old works perfectly for ghost tours. Because of the size of the Lou Ringling Ballroom, we have many weddings booked. It is also used for civic meetings, battle of the bands, auctions, antique shows, and other community events.

This past winter most rooms have been repainted with as close to the original colors as possible when Al. and Lou lived there. Most of the floors have been sanded and re-varnished as well. Some exterior repairs to the carriage entrance were done as well this past winter. Work to the sandstone masonry needs to be done.

We have been fortunate to have some original Ringling family artifacts on display, such as furniture, paintings, clothing, dishes, perfume bottles etc. Some are on loan and some are owned by Joe, Carmen and myself. We have Ringling Circus and family paper on display, however we focus on the Ringling family, not so much on general circus, having such a great museum, Circus World down the road.

Future plans are to open the mansion as a bed and breakfast. Joe and Carmen will be great hosts!