

# Copley's Former La Casa del Zorro Re-Opens With An Encore

BY JEANNE FERRIS



**R**escued in 2013 from complete disrepair and abandonment to the elements, La Casa Del Zorro Resort and Spa is now a testament to its original glory. Genuine smiles light up staff member's faces and a newfound enthusiasm is practically tangible everywhere.

"This is [a] diamond in the rough elegance," said Tim Williams, front office manager of LCDZ. "You can rough it in the day and come back to elegance. It is supremely tranquil and peaceful here." Clear your calendar and prepare to relax—La Casa del Zorro is waiting for you.

In 1960, James Copley (a publishing magnate of Copley Press, Inc., the San Diego Union Tribune and numerous West Coast newspapers acquired the Desert Lodge built in 1937 and renamed it La Casa Del Zorro (home of the fox). He invested in expansions and upgrades befitting a destination resort. La Casa Del Zorro became the social and economic heartbeat of Borrego Springs for four decades. Mr. Copley enjoyed hosting numerous political figures, such as President Richard Nixon, President Ronald Reagan, and many famous Hollywood personalities as his personal guests.

Back in 2007, after being inherited by disinterested son David Copley, LCDZ was sold to ruthless investors who squeezed it lifeless with drastic changes. The investors (one bartender referred to them as "the creeps") made drastic moves, such as renaming it Borrego Ranch, banning children and restricting its restaurants and amenities to hotel guests only. Staff found themselves terminated with no warning and disregarded callously when it was shuttered due to lack of

revenue. Some families moved away and even the local school closed. A depressing three years ensued until its restoration began in 2013.

One night during renovation, Patrick Sampson, the current General Manager hired by the new investors, was startled to find an otherworldly apparition sitting in the Fox Den bar as he was leaving. "Sharing my story, I was told it was Helen Copley," said Sampson. "Then I was asked, was she smiling or frowning? When I said smiling, they said 'that's good, it means she's happy.'"

Her smiling countenance is likely the result of the two million dollars that have been invested in landscaping alone. Now there is a rock labyrinth by starlight and a one-mile walking path with expansive views of the Santa Rosa, San Ysidro and Vallecito mountains. There are six championship floodlit tennis courts, a stadium center court, five heated pools, bicycles for rent and field games of croquet, bocce ball, shuffleboard and life-size chess. A state of the art cardio/weight room and a yoga room with certified personal trainers are available in the Fitness Center.

Forty-eight luxury rooms and eighteen private casitas feature private pools and spas; all were restored with wood burning fireplaces, marble baths and flat screen televisions.

New to LCDZ in January 2015, the Spa is a work in progress. The spa menu offers holistic and therapeutic facial treatments, body therapies, skin and body enhancements and bodywork, such as Hot Stone, Mother-to-Be and more (ask for Claire, who has healing hands. Salon services include manicures, pedicures, full-body waxing and hair services. All spa and salon products featured are natural, organic and sustainable.



Recently opened in November 2014, the Tom Fazio designed Ram's Hill golf course, once private and now

open to the public, is staggering with its lush waterfalls and immaculate blue green grass. Over 10 million dollars was invested to restore this course to its vibrant beauty. Stay-and-play packages begin at one round/one night for \$190 per person. Not for the faint of heart, every hole is a trickster. The ninth hole doesn't bring you to the clubhouse like most courses; however, cart service is available to slake your thirst and break your fast.

All of LCDZ's dining options capture its signature elegance. Unexpected snow-white tablecloths and Wedgwood flatware adorn candle-lit dining tables in the Butterfield Room, which features an alfresco dining patio for guests with canine companions (dogs are allowed in casitas and first floor rooms with a \$50 deposit). Butterfield still offers Mrs. Copley's favored table 44, a centerfield position for viewing.



Butterfield's menu includes seasonal and organic starters such as the Burrata caprese salad of heirloom tomatoes and abounds with classic entrees such as the Wagyu flat iron steak seasoned with ginger honey, pan-seared giant scallops with roasted red pepper crème sauce, fresh fish specials and a seafood



lasagna. The dessert menu is rich with offerings such as the homemade golden honey vanilla sorbet in handcrafted waffle bowls drizzled with caramel sauce and topped with an orchid.

Today, LCDZ contributes to the local economy by participating in the school district's ROP Program known as "Growing our Own Labor Force." These are a series of internships where local high school students are placed with LCDZ to offer insight into the working world. January 2015 also saw LCDZ as a premier sponsor and host of the Awards Ceremony for the micro Borrego Springs Film Festival.

"We've been coming here since the 60's," said Diane Brown of Orange County. "We love the desert and loved coming here for the jazz weekend. The musicians would sit by the pool with their feet in it and play music. That was really fun. Now, we both have a mobility problem, so the relaxing aspect is still wonderful."

The magic of the property is that it permeates the memory so much so that families visit repeatedly, often children visiting again as adults with their own brood. "We mark our guests in generations rather than in numerical order," said Sampson in confirmation. Whether you're returning to La Casa del Zorro or arriving for your first visit, the history, enthusiasm and pure joy surrounding the resort will surely hold your heart, just as they have done for decades.