

Caterers open mansion of special events

By SUSAN RENEAU
of the Potomac News

OCCOQUAN — Chef Tyler Van Rouse and his wife Gloria of Georgetown Caterers Inc. in Occoquan have great plans for Rockledge, the 18th century mansion overlooking the river town.

Historians, business leaders and archaeologists gathered last week to celebrate the start of Rouse's efforts to make rooms in the stone house available for weddings, meetings and other social events. "The mansion would be a nice place for people to mingle after a boat cruise down the Occoquan River," said Dave Yarnell, captain of the Handsome Transom, which offers boat trips in the area.

The mansion will be available for events daily from noon to 1 a.m. A bridal suite on the second floor, complete with a full bathroom and a tub, is also available for rental. There is a maximum occupancy of 100 inside the mansion and a maximum of 125 if a outside canopy on the front terrace is used.

Rockledge was nearly destroyed by arson on Jan. 17, 1980. Ron and Joy Houghton bought the gutted house from Donald Sonner in October 1983.

"It has been so interesting to watch Rockledge mansion evolve from a burned-out hulk of a house to a mansion fit for parties," Chief U.S. Forest Service archaeologist Evan Deblois said.

Deblois and his wife Jan, have watched since 1983 as the Houghtons renovated the 1758 house since 1983. It's fitting for



By Robert J. Stewart-Potomac News

Gloria and Tyler Rouse of Georgetown Caterers Inc. are making Rockledge Mansion in Occoquan available for meetings, parties and other events.

Rouse to cater elegant parties and events at the 20th oldest house in Virginia, they said.

"There must have been so many evenings when people gathered at Rockledge to enjoy each other's company. It is so special this house has remained in private hands," Jan Deblois said.

Deblois said George Washington often wrote about

the builder of Rockledge, John Ballandine, and Ballandine's automated grist mill in his journals. Ballandine built mills and an iron foundry as the town grew as a commerce center in the 17th century.

The Houghtons have worked with Deblois and Travis McDonald of the Rockefeller Foundation in Williamsburg to restore the mansion and replace

windows, supporting beams, floors and walls.

"Rockledge has been our labor of love. We did the work on a shoestring and thanks to a construction loan of \$105,000 we were able to start the job," Joy Houghton said.

"This house is a part of our American heritage we wanted to preserve, so it is appropriate it be used for special occasions," Ron Houghton said.