



GEMINI GIANT/LAUNCHING PAD NEW OWNERS TO HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE AS PART OF KICK-OFF OF ROUTE 66 MILES OF POSSIBILITY CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact Debyjo Ericksen, conference organizer, 815-690-3983 or dje731@sbcglobal.net or William Kelly, Executive Director, Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway, 217-525-9308 or wkelly@illinoisroute66.org

Tully Garrett and Holly Barker have officially purchased the Gemini Giant/Launching Pad as of October 17, 2017. The famous muffler man statue and drive-in restaurant will remain at their original location at 810 East Baltimore Street (Route 66) in Wilmington, Illinois. They will be introduced by Cory Jobe, Director at Illinois Office of Tourism, after his keynote address that kicks off the Route 66 Miles of Possibility Conference in Joliet. Jobe's address is at 9am on Friday, October 20th, followed at 9:30am by a press conference with owners Tully Garrett and Holly Barker. An official from the City of Wilmington will also be on-hand.

The restaurant dates to 1960 under the original name of Dairy Delite, and in 1965 was renamed Launching Pad, becoming home to the Gemini Giant, a fiberglass "Muffler Man" sporting a space helmet and rocket ship. It is a remnant of our fascination with space travel in the 1960s.

New owners Tully Garrett and Holly Barker describe themselves as "second-chance soulmates." They both lost their spouses to cancer in the last several years. "We were both living the American dream and we both had our lives crash in on us due to the loss of our spouses," said Barker.

According to Barker, Garrett owns an insurance agency that has been in his family for 55 years. Tully was also in the music industry, and his extensive music memorabilia collection will be on display at the Launching Pad in a mini-museum. Tully has a real affinity to classic cars and car shows and he plans on hosting car shows at the Launching Pad and wants to partner with local business owners to help bring in the community to make this a huge success.

Barker started working in restaurants the day she turned 16 and continued to work through high school to afford a trip to England and thus her love for travel adventure was born. She is "so excited to embrace the travel and tourism industry here in Illinois." Holly describes herself as a world traveler having lived in three different countries and travelled extensively.

Barker has worked at a broad spectrum of restaurants, including a BBQ restaurant in North Carolina where she is from, all the way to fine dining establishments. She earned a minor in Food Service Management with a BS degree in Health Promotion from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. Her first job out of college was working for PYA Monarch Food Service Distribution which later became US Food Service. She left the food service industry in 1998 to join the pharmaceutical industry where she worked for Abbott Laboratories with its home base close to Chicago.

Holly retired from the industry in 2015 after her husband passed away from cancer in 2014 and moved home to establish Grief Anonymous and the Grief Resource Network for grieving people in crisis. Grief Anonymous, is

an online grief support organization with 70K+ membership with 60 online volunteer administrators and a Facebook page that has a million views a month and is growing rapidly.

According to Barker, Holly and Tully met in one such online group for widowers and widows. They became instant online friends for months, and later when they met in person, “the two fell instantly in love.”

Holly says the purchasing of the Gemini Giant/Launching Pad “offers them a genuine opportunity for personal happiness. Tully gets his car shows and music and to eat great food...Holly gets her back room for community events and the opportunity to meet people within her network...the opportunity through her kitchen to create what the town of Wilmington longs for as well as a new business model for restaurants where everyone shares in the success.”

With the Grief Resource Network, Holly plans on bringing her skills to the Launching Pad and helping with the homeless crisis in Chicago, utilizing the food trucks and a percentage of the restaurants profits to aid in her cause to feed the hungry. The organization will house itself in the back of the Launching Pad. The front of the building will provide “the full experience of historical nostalgia and the great food and experience everyone is hoping for,” said Barker. “The restoration of the Launching Pad to its original glory and intent is paramount, with the added new benefits of our community projects. We will be starting renovations on the exterior of the building and then moving in phases on the inside of the building during the winter months. We hope to be ready by late spring of 2018.”

However, Garrett explained that they bought the building “as is” and do not have knowledge yet of the extensive repairs that are needed due to the building staying vacant for five years. “What is there now is ‘pot luck’ as to what works and what doesn’t in terms of the kitchen equipment, freezers, HVAC, and electrical so to project what we can do and when can do it will be better described as we know what we have to repair. We will build our cash flow through food trucks and merchandise sales that will then be reinvested into the renovations. In essence, the town and visitors will have a hand at ‘Operation Launch the Pad’.” said Tully.

“This is fantastic news for Wilmington and the annual Route 66 Red Carpet Corridor event that includes the community,” said Debyjo Ericksen, Route 66 Miles of Possibility conference organizer. “We are excited to have Cory Jobe introduce the owners at the press conference on Friday.”

“The Gemini Giant is one of the top five Route 66 attractions in the state,” said Bill Kelly, Executive Director of the Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway. “We are glad to see it remain in Wilmington and get the attention it deserves from the new owners. The Byway wishes them the best of success.”

To register for the Route 66 Miles of Possibility Conference, please visit route66miles of possibility.com. For more information on the Gemini Giant/Launching Pad, visit www.facebook.com/thelaunchingpadroute66.