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Sand in my Shoes: Photographer has online treasure trove of Atlantic City images

Photographer creates a treasure trove of pictures of the resort, old and new.



By MARTIN DeANGELIS, Staff Writer February 16, 2013

Barry Rich started taking pictures in Atlantic City in about 1946, but he lost a lot of those early ones, which bugs him to this day.

Now, at 77, Rich is still taking pictures in his hometown - but he makes sure never to repeat that mistake of losing his images.

He does that through the magic of computers, his professional field from the 1950s until he retired in 1997. For more than 15 years now, Rich has combined his knowledge of technology with his passion for photography in a project he calls "Digital Atlantic City: A photographic essay."

That's actually just one of several archives on his portal page, barryrich.net. He also has extensive pages of pictures from his travels around the world with his wife, Mary Ann ("The Seven Continents"); of their two sons and five grandchildren ("Family Site"); and of Barry's Atlantic City High School class. ("ACHS Class of 1953" - he's the class historian and official photographer, and his archive includes the 350 or so senior pictures he scanned from the school yearbook.)

His Digital Atlantic City also includes works of other photographers - Rich has copied and posted some of the thousands of old images collected by his long-ago Inlet neighbor, Allen "Boo" Pergament, who maintains an Atlantic City history museum stuffed into a bedroom of his Margate home. Plus Rich has been approached by other local photographers who asked him to display some of their pictures on his site.

Still, Rich took the vast majority of the shots he put online, and he keeps taking more of them, usually two weekends per month - even if he now lives in the Burlington County town of Mount Laurel and so is only a visitor to his old hometown. He and Mary Ann like to stay at Harrah's Resort in Atlantic City, and she enjoys playing the occasional slot machine, which lets her husband indulge his photography habit - including sometimes right from the hotel room, where he has found dramatic shots of its Marina District neighbors robed in clouds.

He has all his pictures catalogued by category, and his categories are stacked in long columns on his Digital Atlantic City page.

There's an essay that details the construction process at the Borgata, another of the Revel project from start to finish, one of "Harrah's New Tower," and another called "Harrah's New Tower at Night."

There's a series of slide shows on the life and death of a casino - one called "Sands Casino 1980-2006," another on "Sands Casino Liquidation," one on "Sands Casino Before Implosion" and, finally, "Sands Casino the Aftermath."

Rich talked his way into Rando's Bakery in the Ducktown neighborhood for a photo essay on the process of baking a batch of Atlantic City's famous Italian bread. His pictures take the viewer from the dough being mixed to the loaves being rolled and cut and baked to the bread being bagged up for delivery to all the markets and sub shops and pizza joints waiting for their daily shipments.

"What he does through his photos is, he tells stories," says Alex Marino, the operations director at the Carnegie Center in Atlantic City - the old Carnegie Library. It's now owned by Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, and it's the subject of two Rich essays, "Carnegie Library Center Historic" and "Carnegie Library Center 2009."

Marino met Rich when the photographer came and spent several hours shooting pictures in and around the 1903 landmark. The host was impressed both by the level of detail in Rich's work and by the results he put online. And once Marino saw everything else Rich had on the Digital Atlantic City page, he emailed a link and a recommendation to more than 100 people he knew would appreciate it.

"It's one centralized location, free of charge, where people can go and see old pictures of Atlantic City," says Marino, who's also an Atlantic County freeholder. "And he really does a nice job of categorizing. ... It's a great resource that more people should know about."

And even though they met through the local pictures, Marino also has checked out and enjoyed some of Rich's travel shots.

"When I grow up, I'd love to be Barry Rich," Marino says. "Because he travels all over the world, and he's a great photographer. I'm envious of the guy."

Marty Blumberg, a well-known Atlantic City-based architect and the president of Rich's Class of 1953, is another admirer of Rich's work with a camera and a keyboard.

"He's always taking pictures. He's an excellent photographer and he has a fantastic website," says Blumberg, who appreciates good architecture pictures, but adds Rich also has taken pictures at every five-year reunion for his class - and put them online, carefully and helpfully categorized, of course.

"I don't know where he finds the time to do it all," says Blumberg, who is still working.

Rich is actually only semi-retired - he works two days per week at an auto-auction house near his home, where his computer knowledge is such a part of his image his fellow workers call him "Dot.com."

And Rich clearly enjoys still using his professional skills. On his site, he identifies which programs he used to create his displays - along with all the technical specs of the pictures, including what cameras and lenses and other gear he used to capture them.

He also has professional experience as a photographer. His first job in the old Atlantic City was at a photo studio, and even while he was working all those years for such computer pioneers as Philco

and Sperry Univac, he also was moonlighting as a weekend wedding photographer. He still just loves taking pictures - and he loves Atlantic City, both the old and the new versions.

"I'll go to Atlantic City at the drop of a hat," he says. "As long as I can get somewhere near the White House" - yes, the legendary sub shop, and of course, it's another Digital Atlantic City subject - "I'm happy."

On the phone the other night, Rich was going over his site with a curious reporter, telling some of the stories of how he got his pictures and why he chose what he chose on it. He made it clear he has never made a dime from his pictures - and never even wants to.

"Everybody thinks I'm nuts, but I don't want to get involved with it," he says. "At my age? Not really. But I enjoy it. It's a lot of fun."

In fact, it even costs him money to do what he does. He has to pay for his online domain - he has to lease that barryrich.net name, not own it - and he has to pay a Web-hosting company to display all his treasures. But he's so serious about keeping his pictures alive, and with them, decades of Atlantic City's history, he has even arranged with one of his sons to keep his site online after dad isn't here to do it anymore.

Barry Rich loves seeing the totals of his visitors go up, and he is happy to be featured in his hometown paper - because then more people will know about his pictures.

And sure, he says, The Press can feel free to pick a few samples of his work to print with his story.

"You have," he points out, "thousands of pictures to choose from."

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