



Inspired by the renaissance of Dubuque's downtown, owners began an extensive renovation of the historic hotel. A grand reopening was held in September 2009.



Hotel Julien Dubuque photos

A postcard shows a historic photo of the hotel. In 1913, the hotel was ravaged by a fire. It was rebuilt and in 1915 the hotel was renamed the Hotel Julien Dubuque.

## A Reborn Landmark

Hotel Julien once again reigns as Dubuque's showplace

By Lori Erickson  
Correspondent

DUBUQUE — Every great city needs a great hotel. In Dubuque, that landmark lodging establishment has stood on the corner of Main and Second streets since 1839.

Originally named the Waples House, it hosted such luminaries as Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain. After being destroyed in a fire in 1913, the hotel — now known as the Hotel Julien — was rebuilt on an even more luxurious scale, an eight-story edifice that dominated the city's downtown. By the early 2000s, however, years of decline had turned the once-grand hotel into a down-at-heels shadow of its former self.

"It was badly out of date and frayed around the edges," says Mark Czeshinski, a longtime Dubuque resident who is director of sales for the hotel. "Some of the rooms were so small you didn't need to have a remote control because you could just lean forward and change channels on the TV."

Thanks to a \$32 million renovation, the Hotel Julien is once again Dubuque's showplace. Since its reopening in 2009, it has garnered a list of accolades that make it a destination hotel not just for the city, but for the entire region. Martha Stewart Weddings Magazine named it the best place in Iowa to get married, followers of the travel website Expedia voted it one of the top hotels in the world and



In the \$32 million renovation, owners took great pains to restore the historic spirit of the hotel.

Midwest Living Magazine dubbed it one of the top 10 best new places to eat, play and stay.

The transformation from dowdy to stunning was a carefully planned and executed enterprise orchestrated by descendants of Louis Pfohl, who purchased the hotel in 1962. It began with a gutting of the interior and reconfiguring of the original 168 guest rooms into 133. In keeping with Dubuque's commitment to being an environmentally responsible city, the renovation followed green principles, including installation of a geothermal heating and cooling system as well as a reflecting roof that reduces energy needs.

The renovation also remained true to the historic spirit of the hotel. Thankfully, a treasure trove of artifacts had been saved from prior restorations, including Victorian-era mirrors, vintage art prints and original wrought iron tiles. The arched windows

overlooking the front door were restored, as were the bricked-over windows in the ballroom. A design team scoured drawings, blueprints and photographs to recreate the interior furnishings, using original materials when possible and installing artisan-crafted reproductions when necessary.

One salvaged piece of history is particularly precious: a giant mirror that once graced the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York City. Performers in the Ziegfeld Follies like Will Rogers and W.C. Fields once caught a last glimpse of their costumes in the mirror before walking on stage to perform. The mirror now reflects the comings and goings in the hotel lobby, from out-of-town executives making deals to brides descending the staircase on their wedding day.

Since the Hotel Julien's reopening, it has once again become the pride of Dubuque. "During our first year, longtime city residents

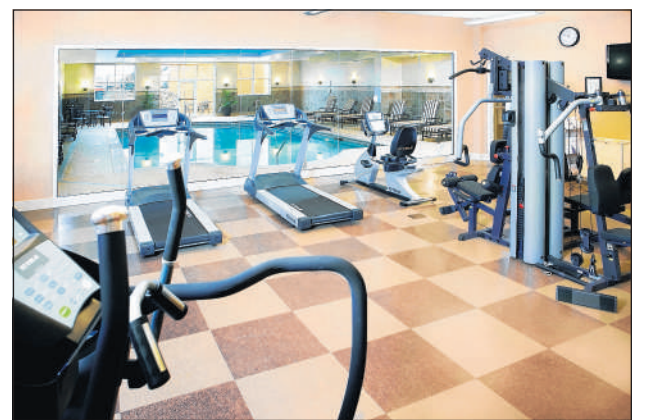
### Hotel Julien

**Where:** 200 Main St., Dubuque  
**Contact:** (563) 556-4200  
**More information:** [www.hoteljulienDubuque.com](http://www.hoteljulienDubuque.com)

would come into the lobby for the first time and their jaws would drop," says Czeshinski. "They couldn't believe the hotel's transformation."

### Sophisticated amenities

While the Hotel Julien remains true to its historic roots, it also offers the latest in comfort and amenities to its guests. Guest rooms are appointed with dark wood furnishings, high-end linens, flat panel TVs and spacious bathrooms. The Riverboat Lounge offers a retreat just off the lobby, while Caroline's Restaurant, located in the hotel's lower level, serves American cuisine with a gourmet twist and is open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Hotel Julien Dubuque has a fitness room, pool and spa.

### Exploring Dubuque

Like the hotel, this Mississippi River city has undergone a remarkable transformation within the past decade. Within walking distance of the hotel include:

- The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium
- The Grand Harbor Resort and Waterpark
- Diamond Jo Casino
- A river walk that features outdoor sculptures.

Also, try the eclectic restaurants and shops of Main Street, including:

- Pepper Sprout, which uses fresh, seasonal ingredients
- Town Clock Plaza, which has live entertainment
- The Dubuque Art Museum, which has free admission
- The Fenelon Place Elevator, the world's shortest, steepest

The hotel's Potosa Spa offers pampering in a dimly lit, soothing oasis. Named after the wife of Julien Dubuque (the city's namesake), Potosa provides a full range of spa services, including massages, facials, baths and body treatments.

Many guests are intrigued to learn of the hotel's gangster history. During the Prohibition Era, Al Capone was a frequent guest, and there is some evidence that at one time he was part-owner of the hotel. Local lore says Capone and his entourage would come to Dubuque when things got too hot for him in Chicago. He used a nearby underground garage to hide his cars and would take

over the hotel's entire top floor for weeks at a time. Conveniently, the location provided an excellent view of the bridge that led to Illinois, so Capone would have warning if federal authorities or rival gangs came looking for him.

Today the Capone Suite recalls the hotel's most notorious guest. Located on the second floor, it includes two bedrooms, a living room and kitchen, all decorated in a luxurious style that likely would have pleased the gangster.

"We're proud to preserve the hotel's history, even the notorious parts," Czeshinski says. "This place reflects the spirit of the city."

## TGR/Costly production reunites friends, high school classmates

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days. "Casey and I have been very good friends since high school and were best man in each other's weddings," Harrington says by phone from his office in New York. "I keep in the loop of what TCR is doing. When they announced this season, I thought, this is a show I know and love."

After some creative scheduling, the theater flew Harrington out for the show's auditions in mid-May. He helped cast the show, stayed and launched right in with two weeks of intensive dance rehearsals. After that, he turned the reins over to Debth and two other dancers in the show, flew back to his wife, daughter and job in New York, and planned to return for the final two weeks leading up to opening night.

Debth says "the stars aligned" for him to come back to Cedar Rapids to do some freelance work, audition for the show, then stay on to direct and choreograph "Damn Yankees," opening in October

at Theatre Cedar Rapids. Debth also came back in 2010 to star as Leo Bloom in "The Producers," the show which reopened the historic theater after the Floods of 2008.

In that production, his innocent character got sucked into a con game. In this show, he's all about the game.

Sky Masterson is "the biggest gambler there is," Debth says. "The reason his name is Sky is because that's how high he bets. He has no fear. He'll bet you whether a fly is going to land on your pinkie or your palm. He'll bet you 10 grand on it. He's fearless, but at the same time, where this show picks up in Sky's life, there seems to be something missing. He doesn't want to admit or recognize that, but during the course of the show he discovers it, and that kind of messes with his head."

He finds what's missing when he accepts a bet from Nathan Detroit — TCR veteran Jonathan Swenson of Marion — to cast his spell on the prim and proper missionary Sarah Brown.

Mary Rinderspacher, 20, of Iowa City, has her first leading role at TCR, playing Sarah, marching through the streets in hopes of turning the masses away from sin.

"She goes through such a change" during the show, Rinderspacher says. "She's a spitfire. She's so focused. Her heart goes into the work she does for the mission, but she's closed off to the rest of the world. She leads with her heart, then she opens up to love."

Prince is especially pleased to see her move from TCR's educational programs and a supporting role in "High School Musical" to this major moment.

"It's fun for her love story to be with Trevor Debth and some of her other interactions with Heather Akers (as nightclub singer Adelaide, Nathan Detroit's long-suffering fiancée) and Jonathan Swenson," Prince says. "It's a fun mix of TCR old and new."

The cast of 35 ranges in age from 17 to 85, with Gene Whiteman, a retired Taft Middle School principal, anchoring the top

end. He's played a plethora of plum roles over the years, from Col. Pickering in "My Fair Lady" in 1977 to FDR in several productions of "Annie" and Don Quixote in "Man of La Mancha."

"I love it," says Whiteman of being in shows. "I just love the age-range of people. I enjoy being with the young people. I enjoy being with the old people, too. It's a good mix and a terrific cast. Everyone is so friendly."

Harrington describes the show as "good old traditional musical theater," with character-driven movement, big production numbers, athletic choreography for the men and more playful movements for the women — with a bit of his signature tap dance tossed in for good measure.

It's also a big-budget show for the theater, where production expenses can run up toward \$100,000.

"It's one of those shows that if you've seen it 20 times, you're going to look forward to seeing it. If you haven't seen it, you're going to walk

away falling in love with it," Prince says. "It's one of those great Broadway recipes, with great dancing, great songs, great

characters to fall in love with and you get to laugh your tail off."

■ Comments: (319) 368-8508; [diana.nollen@sourcemedia.net](mailto:diana.nollen@sourcemedia.net)

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