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Tourism Professor Opens “Be Our Guest Academy” in Carlisle, PA.

CUMBERLAND COUNTY, PA (August 14, 2026)

Pennsylvania native, Dr. Mary Jo Ross of Orlando, Florida boomeranged back to her birth state when Slippery Rock University recruited her a few months prior to Covid to re-write their hospitality curriculum and lead the department's necessary changes in Hospitality, Event Management, and Tourism. A 30+ year career in Florida, the Associate Professor was introduced to Central PA while serving the Pittsburgh's western chapter of the Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging Association based in Harrisburg. Ross' business roots began early in a family-owned grocery store and a lumber business in Butler County.

An early community leader of Butler County's performing arts, Ross' career in special events and food and beverage operations repositioned her in 1999 to Central Florida's tourism corridor having left Penn State University's State College campus. A UCF alumnus, she was one of the inaugural faculty at the University of Central Florida's, Rosen College of Hospitality Management in Orlando and served the Florida Gulf Coast University's Lugert College of Business in Ft. Myers, Florida. In addition, Ross was a contributing consultant for Orlando's downtown Church Street District and authored several instructional designs of hospitality educational programs in Florida. Dr. Ross' success in multi-day event productions utilized her comprehensive and extensive knowledge and experiences as a community leader and as an economic activist for tourism development.

“We're excited to welcome Mary Jo to 35 S. Hanover knowing our building will remain in the Carlisle food and entertainment scene and bring new interests to downtown”, said Nadeen Bogonis. Nadeen and John Bogonis, local real estate investors, leased the space to Exquisite Chocolates until recently.

Be Our Guest Academy will offer entertaining and immersive experiences, as well as special classes for high school and college students in etiquette, professional

development, and career preparation. A USDA certified kitchen is planned to serve as a working laboratory for hands-on training and consulting business development. The kitchen design is in the hands of nationally known Teri Kidwell, owner of ATK Design Studios LLC of Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

Ross will offer adult education and workshops for baking and cooking enthusiasts and in-home entertainers. The Academy's program will include hosting locals monthly state-wide travels in food explorations and cultural adventures with one day journeys to Pittsburgh's Strip District, Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York, and many eastern Pennsylvania's famous food destinations and attractions. "It's not only about embracing great food, but it gives me a lot of pleasure to provide academic, artistic, and culturally enriching opportunities to share with Central Pennsylvania along with leading national and global resources that I have obtained and hopefully to connect with the Cumberland area", said Ross, "but also to help close the gap in guest services, dining etiquette, and personal improvements of wardrobe, live social manners, and proper personal inter-communication skills. My hope is to offer all learners fun educational experiences while cultivating skills that will encourage their personal growth"

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Be Our Guest Academy is scheduling classes in Fall 2026 with travel adventures starting in November with Lowee's Group Tours LLC. The Carlisle Area Chamber of Commerce has arranged a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Tuesday, October 6th at 3:30 PM at 35 S. Hanover Street.

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