



Where local businesses keep in touch.

## Q&A with Tony Leone, owner of Pasfield House

**Name**

Tony Leone

**Title**

Owner and innkeeper,  
Pasfield House Inn,  
525 S. Pasfield St.

**What is your hometown?**

Springfield.

**Tell us about your family.**

I'm an only child. My father is deceased, and my 90-year-old mother lives with me. Both my parents are from Springfield. My father was a floor covering contractor who belonged to the carpenters union. My mother was a bookkeeper for her father's businesses and later mine. For almost 30 years, she did the accounting for the Sangamon County GOP; she was also my office manager for Illinois Campaign Reporting Systems. My parents were always supportive of my interests; I owe a lot of my successes to their assistance and unconditional love.

**How would family and friends describe you?**

I'm a multitasker, someone who likes to be creative. Friends would say I'm a workaholic; outgoing; expressive; big-hearted; and politically speaking, unwaveringly loyal, sometimes to a fault!

**Name a childhood hero? Why?**

President John F. Kennedy. His youthful appearance, charisma, our mutual religion and the fact that he had an ethnic background got my attention way back in grade school, so from the election campaign on, I began following the news and current affairs. On Nov. 22, 1963, I grew up quickly.

**What is your education?**

University of Illinois at Springfield, B.A. in economics, minor in accounting; Springfield College in



Illinois, A.A. in commerce; Griffin High School; further education certification, Illinois Property Assessment Institute, CIAO designation.

**How did you select this career?**

Being the innkeeper of the historic Pasfield House Inn is the capstone to an exciting career. I've invested in my hometown with something that keeps me actively involved as a Springfield booster. I get to use all of what I've learned and the relationships I've developed in creating a keepsake that will remain here another 100 plus

years from now.

Though I am no longer a political activist, I still consider myself a community activist. Operating this business allows me to be active in community affairs, have standing to speak out on the revitalization of the inner city, organize events that bring attention to the city and refine my hobby of exploring the culinary arts. It's the perfect retirement gig. Other than managing my own properties, I would say my current business interests involve historic preservation, tourism and hospitality.

**What were your previous jobs?**

In the mid-1980s I created Illinois Campaign Reporting Systems that made a major impact on state and local politics. I'm best known for having been the House Clerk for the Illinois General Assembly, a job I loved the best.

There were also the chairmanships of the Sangamon County Board of Review and the State Property Tax Appeal Board; I still have local citizens remind me of hearings from long ago. My other key governmental jobs had me supervising elections at the city, county and state levels and as chief of administration and rule making at one time or another for all the public disclosure laws: Illinois Campaign Financing Act; Lobbyist Registration and Reporting Act; and Illinois Governmental Ethics Act. I believe I'm unique in this regard and very proud to have served with distinction in this very essential aspect of American democracy.

**What is the best part of your current job?**

I enjoy meeting people who are visiting Springfield as well as helping residents who are planning a special occasion, business gathering or fundraising event at the Pasfield House. I feel I do a good job trying to relate to them, making their experience here more rewarding. I've always enjoyed event planning and preparing food for large groups of people, something I did in my political life. These skills now help me organize memorable Pasfield House receptions and dinners. I'm captivated with the beauty of architectural and interior design; presently, I'm working to place another one of my properties which I have moved into upon the National Register of Historic Places.

**What is the worst part of your current job?**

I'm required to spend a lot of time at the Pasfield House as the managing innkeeper with little flexibility for taking a getaway. I know no one is going to be sympathetic; it's such a beautiful place. Besides, after all, I like Springfield; I've chosen to live here my entire life.

**How's business?**

Pasfield House Inn overnight reservations are up this year, even in the recession, probably because of the interest in the Lincoln Bicentennial. However, I'm concerned that none of the city hotel-motel tax increase that was passed a couple of years ago is going toward promoting tourism, our fourth-largest local industry. Increasing tourism actually compounds local taxes by generating more alternative revenue that directly benefits our city (hotel-motel tax, sales tax on food and liquor, gas tax and RE tax).

I proudly serve on the board of directors of the Capital Area Independent Business Alliance. I'm glad our community is starting to understand how economically important it is to support locally owned businesses.

I guess you could say I'm a self appointed city ambassador.

**Tell us about your first big success in business?**

I became the youngest Clerk of the House in the history of the Illinois General Assembly. I owe that privilege to then-Republican leader George Ryan, who delegated considerable responsibilities to me. The entire experience was character-building; members of both parties took me under their wings, taking the time to educate me about their representative districts. I developed a real appreciation for the diversity of the State of Illinois, wonderful life lessons that serve me even today.

**What is the best advice you received from a mentor?**

Before being nominated by the House Republican Caucus, Ryan told me, "The members today will vote for you because I ask them. Remember: Next time you'll stand on your record of service. Don't let a member's ideology affect your responsibility to them. You're accountable to do all you can to assist each member within your scope of responsibilities. But ultimately, you must stay within ethical

guidelines and financial boundaries."

Ironically, that's good advice for anyone in the service industry business.

**What is your biggest pet peeve?**

I feel urban sprawl has affected Springfield and is hurting our community much more than some perceive. I see wonderful projects built farther and farther away from the core of the city

Someone donates a tract of land, then surrounding development occurs expanding the city's geographical boundaries when there is minimal population growth. Each construction project is applauded with little forethought that the current infrastructure needs within the present boundaries aren't being met by the current property tax base.

Property values in once well-established neighborhoods are sadly facing decline because of the extra demands taxing bodies are facing as a result of expansion.

I really don't understand why these wonderful projects can't be strategically placed within the inner core of the city. Implemented correctly, every unit of government could benefit with a more favorable tax base.

**Tell us about a particularly difficult business lesson and what you learned from the experience.**

Banks basically ignore commercial property appraisals and offer less favorable interest rates when a business venture's operating cash flow is tight. Banks want to leverage entrepreneurs by attaching liens on a borrower's unencumbered property. As a stockholder in a local bank I understand it but I still don't like it.

The breakeven point in a local start-up business venture, particularly the repurposed reuse of a historic structure, always takes longer than expected. The philosophy behind "Local First" should be practiced more by local banks.

**If you were 21 and graduating from college today, what career would you pursue?**

Well, first and foremost, you have to take a look into the future, balancing family's needs and whether you'd rather remain in Springfield. In choosing a career, you can't become a marine biologist and expect to live here. A number of my high school friends have stayed in Springfield and done well in various careers. No career is a good choice if you don't believe in it.

The History Channel release: "1968: The Year That Everything Changed." It is a fascinating look back in time, narrated

by Tom Brokaw. That's the year I graduated from Griffin High School; I was astounded with the events of that year and the next. Energized, I became aware of the significance politics has on society so I became politically active.

During college I volunteered on campaigns, a stepping stone for my career path. My advice to college students or recent graduates: volunteer somewhere to gain experience; take responsibility and get noticed. I'm convinced, not too long a job offer will come your way.

**What is your favorite vacation spot? Why?**

When I was younger, I often traveled to Louisiana: New Orleans, Baton Rouge and even the Bayou. I love visiting the French Quarter, Cajun and Creole food, Dixieland and Zydeco music, and Louisiana's rich cultural heritage. The state of Louisiana does a great job in keeping up its image and heritage.

Over the years, I've met a Louisiana Governor, House Speaker, even the legendary Pete Fountain. Great memories.

I hated what Hurricane Katrina did to New Orleans. Within nine days of the levee break, I helped Mayor Davlin raise funds at the Pasfield House for the local Red Cross to aid arrivals that were displaced by the devastation.

However, even before Katrina my choice for a getaway had changed to Charleston, S.C. and its connection to the Civil War. Consider: 1) the outbreak of war occurring with the attack upon Fort Sumpter in Charleston Harbor and 2) South Carolina being the first state to secede from the Union, even before Lincoln left Springfield for Washington D C

I love the architectural style of the historic district in Charleston; it remains almost untouched. The Pasfield House could contentedly exist there.

Sadly, I joke that Charleston is a lot like New Orleans, except it's much cleaner and safer. Anyone who has spent some time visiting these two cities knows what I mean.

**What do you do for fun?**

I enjoy live theatrical performances and topical movies. We like being the innkeepers; it's fun to meet the guests.

Otherwise, we dine out with friends, but I actually, love to cook. It's the kind of activity that allows me to use my creativity and get relatively quick gratification.

Live to Eat or Eat to Live, that is the question. My doctor always tells me the key is moderation.

**Name something you can't live without.**

Diet Coca-Cola

**What is your favorite way to unwind from work?**

Some say I never stop working ... I do sleep. Remember, it's not work when you enjoy what you're doing.

I do unwind a bit each night by reflecting on my day's progress. Sure, sometimes the tasks can be challenging but that's part of the excitement. I've never held any paid position since college where I watched the clock. I always try giving my best, but when I feel I am not appreciated, I moved on.

**What are you currently reading?**

Illinois State Historian Tom Schwartz's light read titled "Lincoln, An Illustrated Life and Legacy". He uses several illustrations from Frank Leslie Journal and Harper's Weekly.

I collect 1860s newspaper illustrations from both of these publications. He has done a beautiful job putting the book together; it sits on the coffee table in the Pasfield House Library.

**What is your favorite quote?**

I guess my favorite quote is John F Kennedy's inaugural speech "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." But a close second is Abraham Lincoln's Farewell Speech upon departing Springfield, Feb 11, 1861 "My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place and the kindness of this people, I owe everything." Kennedy and Lincoln, how's that for bipartisanhip?

**How would you like to be remembered from a career/work perspective?**

I'm sure I'll be remembered for restoring the Pasfield House and for my research of the almost forgotten contributions of this patriarchal family. The achievements I accomplished over the years in political circles and as a government servant hopefully made a positive difference not only for my bosses but for the public as well.

Now my end game is to make sure the once obscure 1896 former residence of George Pasfield, which is now the Pasfield House Inn, takes a permanent place in history and hometown pride.