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Hawthorne Inn building goes up for auction Feb. 6

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By Jesse Buchanan Record-Journal staff

BERLIN — The former Hawthorne Inn banquet facility on the Berlin Turnpike will go up for auction on Feb. 6.

The former restaurant has been on the market since the summer of last year. Joe Granato, a broker with American Brokers & Consultants 4 Restaurants who was listing the property, couldn't be reached for comment Wednesday.

The Grelak family owned the inn for 65 years and offered a banquet facility, catering, a lounge, and a restaurant. Hotelier Syed Bokhari bought The Hawthorne in August 2010 for \$1.8 million and spent another \$1.5 million renovating it. Despite the upgrades, the restaurant closed in July.

According to the Berlin tax office, \$80,700 is owed in back taxes on the property. That's two years of personal property and one year of real estate tax unpaid. A buyer for the property will pay liens on the property before a closing.

Philip Marshall, a broker with O, R & L, said the property is remote and rather large compared with most modern restaurants. While it's a landmark business, the development of the Berlin Turnpike provides more options that are better located.

"The time for that type of place has passed. People want a place that's easy to get to. That's not easy to get to," Marshall said.

Marshall wasn't sure how many bidders to expect at the auction but said anyone thinking about buying the place faced a "very large undertaking."

Agents with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives raided the inn along with several homes owned by Bokhari in June 2012. Cars including a 2012 Rolls Royce Ghost were seized from one of Bokhari's Middletown homes.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bokhari dodged taxes on smokeless tobacco and cigars in Massachusetts and Connecticut from 2008 to 2012.

Attorney Martin G. Weinberg, of Boston, represents Bokhari and said his client has pleaded not guilty to the charges. Bokhari's customers were responsible for the fraud charges leveled against Bokhari, according to Weinberg.

Last year, Granato said Bokhari's legal troubles didn't influence his decision to sell The Hawthorne. Bokhari realized his strength was hotels and not restaurants, Granato said.

[Back to SouthingtonNews](#)