

Rita and Barry Levene: The British invasion strikes again

By John Koning

The year was 1607, and a tiny island nation across the Atlantic had just established its first permanent American settlement in south-east Virginia, marking the first British invasion of this country.

Another invasion came in the mid-1960s when four mop-haired rebels, called The Beatles, brought their music and charisma across the Atlantic and captured the hearts of a nation. They were followed by other Brits – James Bond, Twiggy, the Rolling Stones, Audrey Hepburn, Simon Cowell and David Beckham, to name a few.

Now it would appear that we have been invaded again, by Barry Levene and his lovely wife, Rita, who established a bright and beautiful On Top of the World home a few years ago on Franciscan Drive.

These latest British invaders shouldn't concern you too much. There is little chance that this likeable couple will cause you any harm unless, of course, you happen to be line dancing a little too close to Barry when the music moves him.

Enough said.

A little more than a half century ago, 16-year-old Rita invited Barry to the dance floor during a ladies' choice dance at their local club. Barry actually wasn't Rita's first choice for a dance partner but fate intervened, as it often does, and before too long they became a couple.

Despite their flourishing romance, it was eight long years before they tied the knot. That's because Barry was the owner of an upstart rental business and he knew that the financial demands of marriage and child rearing would jeopardize his young enterprise. When they eventually wed, Barry and Rita worked side by side, raising a family of one boy and three girls and building the family business.

They started out renting small do-it-yourself tools, but, as time passed, they gradually moved into heavier machinery. They were the first company in Great Britain to rent Kubota mini backhoes, which, inevitably, created the need for other machinery used to cart the rubble away and to mix cement for pools and patios.

Their rental business was booming for 10 years until, in the 1990s, a five-year recession devastated the economy. That spelled the end of upgrades



Barry and Rita Levene feel blessed to call On Top of the World home

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and renovations for many Brits and it dealt a death blow to the Levenes' once thriving business.

Barry and Rita would have to start over, from scratch.

In the challenging years following the recession, Barry and Rita tried just about anything to make a shilling. An idea was born when Barry began driving taxi for a local company. He quickly realized that he couldn't dig himself out of his financial bind by driving a taxi for someone else, so he saved up for his own taxi license, known as a medallion. Once he had one, he began

saving for another and then he hired drivers to drive his taxi for him.

Rita also worked as a day-time driver while Barry preferred nights. Eventually they built their taxi business into a six-car fleet. It is now run by their son-in-law.

Despite the temporary setback, Barry and Rita feel like they live a blessed life. They spend part of their time in sunny OTOW, close to their son and his family, and the rest with their three daughters and their families in Little London by the Sea.

Who could ask for anything more?

Well, actually, Barry and Rita would take the opportunity to do just that – ask for more. They are hoping to attract a few more card players to their OTOW Texas Card Game Club.

If you're interested in a Texas card game, stop by the East Activity Center on Monday and Wednesday evenings from November through April. There is no obligation to come every time. The number of tables is determined by the number of players who show.

While you're there, say hello to Rita and Barry, the latest exports from Britannia the Great!