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STAFF PHOTO BY HARRY LYNCH

Carolina Inn executive Mark Nelson, left, and UNC alumnus Danny MacNelly, 34, were on hand at the Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill last week for the official unveiling of the long missing painting by MacNelly's father, the late Jeff MacNelly.

## Lost painting of Carolina Inn home again

BY ERIC FERRERI  
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL — In 1970, Jeff MacNelly hadn't yet won any of his three Pulitzer Prizes, nor had he created the long-running comic strip "Shoe" — whose main character was cast in the image of UNC-Chapel Hill journalism professor Jim Shumaker. MacNelly had dropped out of UNC-CH for a job with the Chapel Hill Weekly, and was most likely just trying to scratch up some cash when he painted an oil-on-canvas image of the exterior of the Carolina Inn, UNC-CH's historic hotel. But the painting, the inn's red brick facade under a baby blue, cloud-dotted sky, became the inn's go-to image, used for decades on menus and brochures.

The painting itself disappeared. Inn officials occasionally went looking, to

no avail.

Then, several months ago, an e-mail arrived offering an end to the search. A High Point couple who had bought the painting in the early 1990s — at a yard sale, naturally, because that's how stories like these always go — were willing to sell.

A price was negotiated. The painting was authenticated. Finally, Friday, the inn proudly unveiled its newest acquisition. It will be cleaned and prominently displayed, though inn officials aren't yet sure where they'll put it.

"I knew the existence of the painting, but it had been missing for 40 years," said Ken Zogry, the inn's historian, who about a decade ago had himself tried, with no luck, to find the painting while writing a book about the inn's history. "This guy was an unknown who went on

to fame and fortune. It's a great story."

The couple that made the fortuitous yard sale discovery has remained anonymous, but Zogry acknowledged Friday the inn did purchase the painting. He declined to reveal the price.

In offering the painting, the couple, now living in Massachusetts — was able to offer the ultimate in authentication — a note from MacNelly himself. The couple wrote to MacNelly after buying the painting, asking if he indeed was the artist. They suspected as much because he had signed the painting with the same oversized, loopy autograph that adorns his comic strips.

He wrote back, on full-color "Shoe" stationery, confirming that the painting was his and hoping "you didn't pay too much for it."