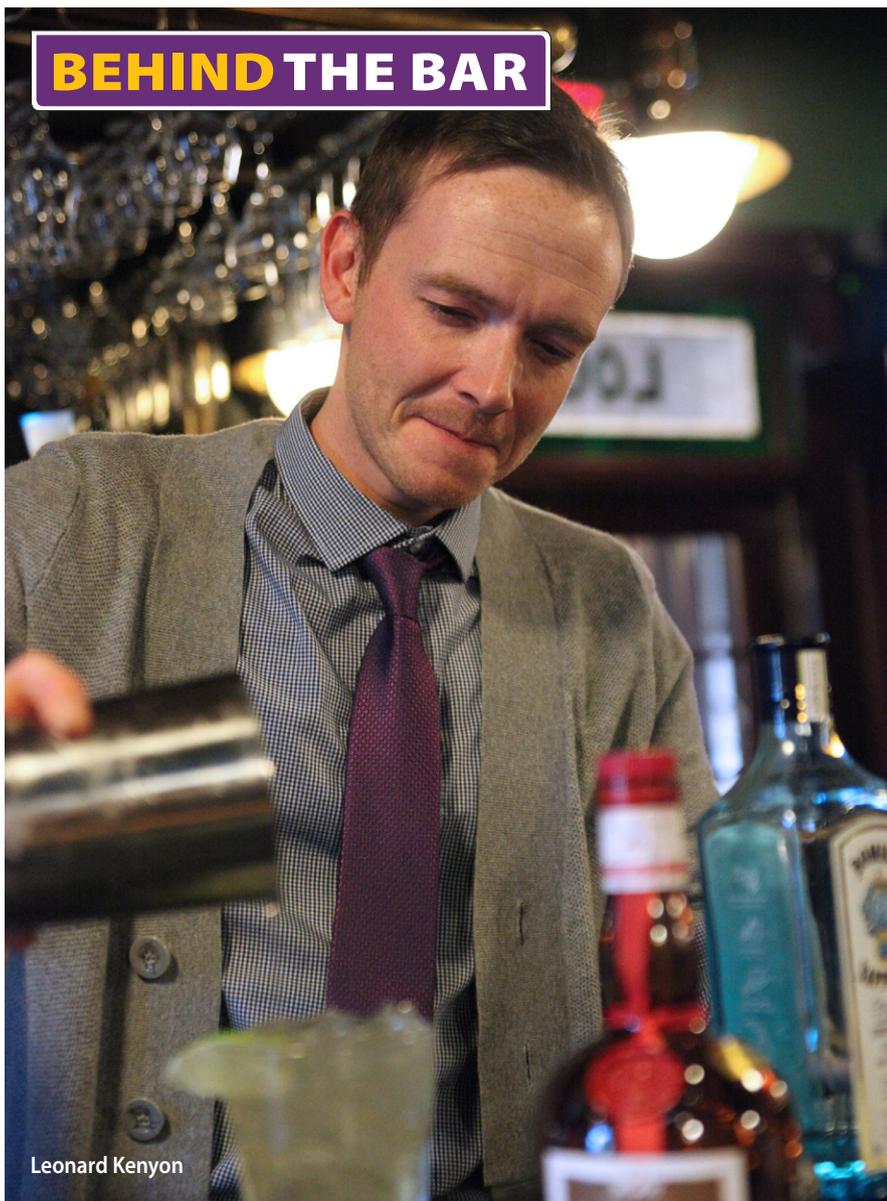


BEHIND THE BAR



Leonard Kenyon

Leonard Kenyon: Creating Day & Night

Bennington Station 10 Depot St., Bennington, VT • (802) 442-7900 • benningtonstation.net
Leonard Kenyon leonardkenyon.com

There's a pretty popular song that paints a vivid picture of a tavern populated with colorful bartenders and guests who are would-be actors, politicians, musicians and novelists.

One of those characters could've come straight from behind the bar at Bennington Station.

Leonard Kenyon – by day an author and illustrator – spends his evenings behind the stick at the southwestern Vermont restaurant, a historical spot that started its life as a railroad station in 1897.

"First of all, the food is really, really great," Kenyon says of Bennington Station. "Chef Robert Andrew really takes it seriously. He cares

about every plate. It's actually really sweet to see how much he loves what he's doing. And the setting – come on – it's really special."

The exterior is rough finished blue marble, quarried and hand cut in West Rutland, giving it the appearance of granite. The town's newspaper at the time hailed the building as "the handsomest and most artistic in the state." It's in this historic spot, where top-notch fare has replaced rail fare, where Kenyon can often be found, pouring drinks, filling orders and solving problems – like what to serve an indecisive guest. While tending bar one night, a customer came in, sat down and presented him with what he calls "every bartender's nightmare."

"I asked him what he wanted," Kenyon says. "He told me, 'I don't know – whatever you think.'"

That's when the creative, multitasking mixologist went to work.

"It's this little gin concoction I dubbed 'The Pig Pen,'" Kenyon says. "Because after he had a few of them he just looked like a bunch of squiggly lines like the Charlie Brown character. Now, any time someone asks me to surprise them or that it's my choice, it's my go-to."

As for comparing a customer to a cartoon character – it's a natural for Kenyon, a writer and an artist whose book, "How to Scare a Monster", is now available at major retailers.

An illustration by Leonard.



A lover of the macabre and satirical, he'd often engage customers with tales of his literary pursuits, and now cites his chosen profession as part of the reason you can see his name on bookstore shelves.

According to this multitasking bartender, one pursuit feeds the other.

How did you first learn the business?

"It was happenstance, really. I was working in a restaurant in the kitchen and the bartender couldn't make it one day. There was an event for the Rotary Club, so I got behind the bar. I was nervous because I had never done it before – I didn't even know how to make a martini. I was open and honest with them, I made a joke out of it, and I told them I had no idea what I was doing. They bossed me around, taught me how to make martinis and Gibsons and gimlets and Old Fashioneds – old fashioned, standard cocktails, and it was so much fun. I used humor as a weapon and a tool that day and I never left. I had so much fun. Of course you learn a bunch along the way, but in a way, those guys were my mentors."

Share a behind the bar secret.

"For me, success stems from the relationships you have with people. I think that was beginning of my success – that first day at that

Rotary Club event, being able to do that with the folks and being able to eat crow and be humble and make jokes about how I didn't know what I was doing. That's what works for me. That's my personal secret. You have to be able to read the folks.

"You have to show humility and treat people the way you'd want to be treated. It's an acting gig. Knowing how to make a good cocktail is important, but in a way it's about sleight of hand. You have to know how to read them: some want conversation, some want solitude, some want a shrink and some want a standup comedian. You've got to know how to sympathize and be empathetic."

What's your favorite part of working behind the bar?

"I'm from North Bennington but I've lived in Oakland and Brooklyn, I've played music and done a lot of different things, and quite often the beauty of working in a restaurant or bar is you find that it's folks' moonlighting job. You find so many creative people – actors, writers, artists, musicians. It's an amazing way to earn the same amount of money in a couple evenings that some people earn in a 40-hour-week at job they're miserable in. It allows me to have the time to pursue my dreams of being an artist and illustrator. I wouldn't have a book coming out if it wasn't for the bar." ☺



The Pig Pen

- 1 part Bombay Sapphire
- 1 part Grand Marnier
- 1 dash of orange bitters
- 1 dash fresh lime juice
- 1 splash of Sprite

Combine all ingredients, shake and serve over rocks with a lime twist.

BAKER'S®

Part of the Small Batch Bourbon Collection®, Baker's® is named after Baker Beam, grandnephew of the legendary Jim Beam. Baker's® Bourbon is distilled at a lower proof and barreled & aged in small batches, allowing the bourbon to pull more toasted nut, fruit & vanilla flavor from the barrel wood.

TASTING NOTES:

- AROMA:**
Fruit, vanilla, caramel
- TASTE:**
Toasted nuts, fruit, vanilla, silky texture
- FINISH:**
Sweet, smooth, medium-long
- PROOF:**
107

VT Code #16580, \$49.99
www.bakersbourbon.com

Baker's® Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, 53.5% Alc./Vol. ©2016 James B. Beam Distilling Co., Clermont, KY. drink smart®

Stock Your Bar for Less

802spirits.com

VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF LIQUOR CONTROL