

## Joe's Discount Beverage



355 River St., Springfield • (802) 885-3555 • Owner: Joe Cerniglia

Walk into Joe's Discount Beverages on River Street in Springfield, and you'll likely find owner Joe Cerniglia talking to a customer. It's one of the things he does best.

"I'm always talking," Cerniglia says, laughing. "Sometimes people can't get out of the store."

And Cerniglia, 53, has plenty to discuss. Google the name and you'll discover that he's part of the family that started Woodchuck Hard Cider in 1991. He's also the founder of Long Trail Multi Sport – a trainer and coach for triathletes, marathoners and other endurance athletes, and he's a volunteer at the Children's Hospital at Dartmouth-Hitchcock. If that isn't enough to keep him busy, Cerniglia is the owner of this long-time Springfield business.

As Cerniglia tells it, he walked into the store on June 6, 1981 and has stayed on ever since.

"It's a friendly place because we know 90 percent of the people who walk through that door," Cerniglia says of the store. "We've been here for so long, we just know everyone. We have great relationships with customers because we don't treat them like strangers."

The store began its life as a warehouse for the family farm stand – filled with apples that later became wine, and much later, hard cider

("a 10 year overnight success story," Cerniglia says).

The 3,000-square-foot store, which is packed primarily with beer, wine and spirits, can surprise visitors. From the outside, it looks like any well-kept, if standard beverage store. Step inside, however, and things look a little more upscale. Tongue-and-groove woodwork surrounds the stock, which includes many Vermont-made products.

"It's beautiful inside," Cerniglia says. "It's not your generic supermarket-type store."

In some ways, it reflects its owner. Those who don't know the affable shopkeeper might be surprised to learn of his Ironman history. While volunteering at CHaD, Cerniglia was motivated to break out of his comfort zone by a young patient with Cystic Fibrosis.

"We were watching the Boston Marathon on TV," he says. "He told me that he couldn't run across the parking lot, and wondered what it felt like to run a marathon. Me being the sap I am, I told him I'd run it and come back and tell him what it's like. So I did."

Cerniglia says he swore off endurance events soon after. Now, 15 marathons later, it would appear that vow didn't stick.

"It started as a promise," he says of the path that would eventually take him to the Ironman World Championships in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. "I ended up taking three other kids to the full Ironman in Lake Placid. Then I started training and racing and coaching. It was 14 years in the making to Hawaii."

When Cerniglia is out training, Store Manager Angela Pollack keeps things working smoothly. It's a relationship that keeps customers leaving with exactly what they were looking for. It all works thanks to a philosophy this coach/entrepreneur adopted early-on.

"Everything is integrated," he says. "You're not one thing or the other. As a coach, father and business owner, it's how you do things. We get along so well because you always want to set people up to succeed. It's a process – it's how to help clients, managers, family through a great relationship. I'm a perfectionist, and



Decorative decanters add a bit of store whimsy.

I'm always about refining the process. You set people up to succeed."

In the meantime, Cerniglia is preparing for the Burlington Marathon, a series of triathlons and qualifying for the Nationals and the Ironman in Maryland next October, and organizing athletes for a five month running group.

Then there's the no-small task of running a successful business.

"I love my job," the busy coach/business owner says. "I enjoy coming into work every day, the people, the job. I always look forward to it, so it's not really work – even though it is." ☒

Written by Bill Burke | Photos by Matthew Thorsen