

116 Wine and Spirits



Store Manager
Craig Colburn

Each morning when Craig Colburn turns on the lights and unlocks the front door of 116 Wine and Spirits each morning, he does more than start the day. He returns to his roots.

Prior to joining the team at 116 Wine and Spirits a year ago, Colburn's family owned a store for more than 30 years in nearby Richmond. It sold in 2010 and Colburn stayed on-board to run the beer, wine and liquor departments before deciding to step away in 2017.

"I was looking around at different jobs when I realized that this is all I know how to do," Colburn says, laughing. "I really enjoy doing it. I enjoy the contact with the people — both the customers and the people at Vermont Liquor Control, some of whom I've known for 25-30 years. I really like the connections and being part of the community."

Colburn knew store owners David and Michelle Palmer, who reached out to the longtime shopkeep when the need for an experienced hand arose.

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"To me, it was like going back to my roots, where we have one location and I can be very hands-on in every aspect of the business," Colburn says. "I'm very appreciative to them, and now my job is to grow the business."

With decades of experience behind him, Colburn began executing a plan to do just that.

"It's tough to be a stand-alone liquor store in Vermont," he says. "You need something else. My job is to get liquor customers to cross merchandise and pick up beer or wine or spirits here instead of going to the grocery store. I want to make them feel like the extra stop is worth it."

Customer service is the difference, he says. The 56-year-old has longtime customers who followed him from Richmond to Hinesburg, thanks in no small part to the close attention he pays to the needs of the clientele. It's an approach that served him well for nearly three decades.

"I joke that it took 30 years in Richmond," he says. "But I won't be here in 30 years so maybe we can accelerate the program."

Part of his mission, he says, is to be a good steward of Vermont products.

"Vermont is a small state and we're all competing for the same customers, especially in Chittenden County," he says. "So what do

you do to set yourself apart? You need to focus on the customer service aspect — make sure you have the selection, do what you can to accommodate special orders, make use of social media, make use of the state's better technology.

“Without getting too philosophical, I believe you can interact with customers and give them the attention, and by-and-large, you can have a hand in how your product is perceived in the community. You can sell it the right way.”

116 Wine and Spirits opened in August in 2012. Customers who step into the 1,500

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square-foot store tucked into a plaza at the corner of Commerce Street and Route 116 are greeted by a selection of Vermont-made spirits.

“That's something we definitely want to promote — the smaller distiller, the independent distiller,” Colburn says. “That goes back to responsible selling. It's quality over quantity, really. That's how to sustain a viable business and that's how to be a good neighbor.”

When Colburn isn't at 116 Wine and Spirits, he and his wife — a teacher at Burlington High School — enjoy time with their rescue dogs and traveling. He also ponders philosophers from time to time, specifically the work of a New Jersey-based thinker.

“All of my philosophy can probably be traced back to a Springsteen song,” says Colburn, a classic rock aficionado who counts Springsteen as a favorite.

So if he had to apply his love of The Boss to his career, which lyric would fit best?

“I'm inclined to go with a line from ‘Tenth Avenue Freeze Out,’ he says. “*When the change was made uptown and the big man joined the band.*” I am about the same size as Clarence Clemons, and I feel that I'm joining something already established to make it more than the sum of its parts — with apologies to Clarence and the Boss.” ☺

116 Wine and Spirits
22 Commerce St., No. 4, Hinesburg
(802) 482-4010

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