

BEHIND THE BAR



General Manager Michael Allen behind the bar

A Sort of Homecoming

Barre Partners Create Community (and Dining)

The Cornerstone Pub and Kitchen may have begun its life just six years ago, but the idea was a long time coming.

When owners Rich McSheffrey and Keith Paxman — best friends and Barre natives — launched their respective careers in the restaurant business, their travels took them away from the Granite City. But the idea for a great dining spot in Barre never really went away.

Fast-forward to October of 2012 — Paxman and McSheffrey opened the doors to their hometown eatery, filled its tables and bar stools with “friends, families, trades and business people” and have remained (for lack of a better term) the cornerstone of the downtown community since.

Written by Bill Burke | Photography by Oliver Parini

“The owners are still very much involved and the place is always evolving and changing,” General Manager Michael Allen says. “They’re always trying to improve. We’ve had a good reception ever since we opened, but we’re in a constant state of evolution to stay relevant.”

The Cornerstone Pub and Kitchen serves up appetizers ranging from fried pot stickers and calamari to poutine and cheddar horseradish crab cakes; a dizzying array of mac and cheese dishes (lobster, buffalo, bacon jalapeno, sugar shack and BBQ, among them); and renowned signature burgers, like the Banh Mi Pork Burger, the Salmon Burger, a turkey burger, the Smokehouse Burger and the Localvore Burger, made from New England beef and topped with Cabot cheddar.

The L-shaped bar seats four on the short

end and 11 down the lengthy stretch, providing plenty of room for the team to plan its next move — whether it’s concocting a new cocktail, dreaming up a new menu item or working on an annual charity event, like the Cornerstone vs. Cancer chili cook-off, where all proceeds go to the Vermont Cancer Survivor Network.

“We do a lot of community outreach,” Allen says. “Any time there’s a family in need or someone who needs help, we try to use our social network platform to help out or to organize a fundraiser.”

It’s all part of the Cornerstone’s mission, says Allen — who has spent many nights behind the bar during his six years at the North Main Street spot. He started his bartending career in college, continued it at a Montpelier spot for five years, and has been with the Cornerstone Pub and Kitchen since it opened. It’s there that visitors can spot Allen, likely whipping up one of the pub’s best-known cocktails, the Painkiller — a rum-based drink with a touch of the tropics.

What was your first night as a bartender like?

“It wasn’t super eventful. I started off working Monday nights so it was kind of slow. There was probably a Monday night football game going on — just a Monday night in Montpelier. To be honest, I remember just being happy; people were ordering beers and not many cocktails.”

What’s the philosophy of your bar program?

“Doing simple cocktails very well and always trying to have an updated draft list. Our list is constantly evolving with a focus on Vermont products. We definitely do plenty of Vermont



Please drink responsibly.



The Painkiller

- 2 ounces Gosling's Dark Rum
- 1 ounce cream of coconut
- 4 ounces pineapple juice
- 4 ounces orange juice
- Shaved nutmeg
- Ice

Combine all ingredients and shake. Pour into a 16 ounce Ball jar over ice and top with shaved nutmeg.

spirits. For example, we do a Moscow mule, but ours is called a Green Mountain Mule. It's similar but we use Green Mountain Vodka."

Share a behind the bar secret.

"Always be smiling. It keeps people in a good mood and it keeps a positive vibe at the bar. If that's happening, then everything else falls into place."

What advice would you give aspiring bartenders?

"Don't get frustrated. Don't get too tied up in the technicalities of bartending. Just know that you'll figure it out. It'll come to you. The best way to learn is just by doing. I had a restaurant job in college where we'd make our own drinks and by my first bartending gig I kind of knew what I was doing."

What do you like most about your job?

"Being able to socialize and spend time with good people and trying to help out in the community."

If I wasn't a bartender, I would...

"If I didn't have some boring desk job, I'd be a surfer. I've surfed just a handful of times in Maine, but that's what I'd do." ☹

The Cornerstone Pub and Kitchen
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