

Loyal, Local, Long-Lived

Dining Through the Decades at The Windjammer

At the Windjammer Restaurant and Upper Deck Pub, the iconic South Burlington landmark now celebrating its 40th year in business, bartender Mike Malinowski is stocking the upstairs bar and readying for a busy evening.

With a strong local clientele and a high-energy vibe, a full house is almost a given. And yet after more than four decades of consistency, General Manager Dan Phelan says staffers don't take that loyalty for granted.

"If you haven't been in a while — we've grown a lot," Phelan says. "I think it's fun to show people how we've developed and changed."

Over the years, there have been accolades (including a Wine Spectator award for its ex-

tensive wine list) and additions to a fine dining menu and an eye-opening bar program (hello, Pappy van Winkle). Yet at the same time, some of what makes this spot such an enduring and welcoming destination remains unchanged — namely, the personal touch guests can expect.

"We've got such a tight-knit group of employees that also feel like part of the family," Phelan says. "We've got many people who have been here for five, 10, 20 and 30 years. There's a tremendous amount of longevity among the staff."

"We've got people like Mike (Malinowski) who are interactive with our guests," Phelan, who recently surpassed 17 years at The Windjammer, says. "They develop long-lasting relationships with guests. They're not just

taking orders. There's a longevity there that allows us to become tight-knit and close with families and couples because you see them for years — in Mike's case, for five years now."

Opened by Walt Levering in 1977, The Windjammer remains family-owned by Laura and Tom O'Connell. The longtime South Burlington favorite prides itself on consistently excellent food and service, as reflected by the generations of residents who have come to The Windjammer for top-notch steak and seafood and to indulge in the popular boat-shaped salad bar in the downstairs area.

"We've really dialed-in on what we do well and continued to grow," Phelan says.

Malinowski, who spends his evenings behind the 27 seat, centrally located bar at the Upper Deck Pub on the second floor, is also from South Burlington. There's a good chance, then, that when someone walks upstairs, he's known that person — in some cases for years.

Keeping things local is an important part of the ethos at The Windjammer. Malinowski whips up a memorable cocktail called Leave the Stinger — his version of a Bees Knees (a classic cocktail typically made with gin, honey and lemon). Only the version guests at The Windjammer will sip is made from locally produced products, including Barr Hill Gin and honey.

Malinowski found his way to The Windjammer in 2014 by way of its stellar reputation and has stuck around since.

"I see most of my regulars more than I see some of my friends and family," he says.

What was your first night behind the bar like?

"One of my first nights behind bar here was the night of a UVM hockey game. We have a big UVM hockey following, so the place filled up really quickly a few hours before game time. We were crazy busy for a few hours, and then right when it starts, everybody left. It went from 100% down to 30%, and I was wondering, 'what's going on? That was wild.' The other bartender just said, 'hold on and wait until the game ends.' When it was over around 10 p.m., it all filled up again. And that still happens — it can happen whether it's a Monday night or a Friday night."



From left: Mike Malinowski and Dan Phelan



Leave the Stinger

- 1 ounce Barr Hill Gin
- 1 ounce Ancho Reyes Chili Liqueur
- ¾ ounce lemon juice
- ¾ ounce honey

Combine all ingredients in a shaker and shake well. Pour into a martini glass, served up.

What do you like most about your job?

"I like interacting with guests and building relationships. For example — we have our regular following, and all of the bartenders here know what they like to drink, so the second they walk up stairs — before they even sit down — I have their drink made. That's how I greet them."

Share a behind-the-bar secret.

"The biggest thing is to be prepared. When I'm getting ready for work, I think about the worst thing that could happen during the night and what I can do to prevent that from happening. After that, stock everything up as full as it can be. Be ready and bring high energy. Preparation is key for this position."

Any advice you would give aspiring bartenders?

"Know your products. You can't get caught not fully understanding what a certain beer is or what style of spirit a certain liquor is. Knowing that background knowledge of beer and liquor is extremely important. Having that knowledge helps you gauge and understand better what customer will want."

If you weren't a bartender, what would you be?

"I'm still trying to figure that out. I like being in front of people, so it would have to be something of that sort. I went to school for finance, but that didn't end up like I thought it would be." 🍸

The Windjammer Restaurant

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TOGETHER WE RYED

On the nose, fresh cinnamon and black peppercorn mingle, with a hint of tangerine and grapefruit zest. The palate is powerfully spicy, with cocoa, cardamom and cured leather flavors enhancing the grain forward character of this classic rye. The finish is wonderfully lengthy, with baking spices, oak, and vanilla lingering, and hints of citrus throughout.

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The WhistlePig Ryeball

- 1½ ounces WhistlePig PiggyBack Rye
- Venetian Ginger Ale
- Lemon

Fill a highball glass with ice. Pour in WhistlePig PiggyBack Rye. Top with Venetian Ginger Ale and a squeeze of lemon.

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