

All in the Family

Basin Harbor Resort — a Generational Affair for Guests and Staff

There are businesses that trace ownership back to previous generations. Then there's the Beach family and its multi-generational connection to Basin Harbor.

The Vergennes resort, set at the end of a winding country road on 700 unspoiled acres alongside Lake Champlain, has been run by the Beach family since 1886. If you're lucky enough to spend some time at the resort, you'll likely run into Bob Beach, Jr., or Pennie Beach — both of whom are fourth-generation hosts.

Or, if you're on-site and planning what do to or where to explore, you'd do well to seek out Sarah Morris, a fifth-generation host at Basin Harbor who knows the resort's best kept secrets: where unforgettable views can be discovered, where the best hikes might take you or where to find the best food and drink around.

"It's a playground for all ages," Morris says. "It was certainly the case when I was younger. I grew up at the resort and very much in this industry."

The result: Morris has the institutional knowledge and hospitality work ethic embedded in her DNA.

"All of us here at Basin Harbor have spent time in pretty much every role on campus," Morris says. "I haven't gotten greasy and used a wrench, but I've done almost everything else. I've worked in the dish pit, cut fruits and vegetables in the kitchen — we're very much a 'whatever it takes' establishment. Our team works together, and because of that we appreciate each other because we've dabbled in every role."

That sometimes rotational system also found Beverage and Outlets Manager Molly Goodyear taking on a new role last year: bartender. Goodyear jumped behind the sticks when pandemic restrictions made day-to-day operations challenging. While she may have been new to bartending, she was not new to the Champlain-side destination. Goodyear has more than 25 years there after moving north from South Carolina and falling in love — both with the Basin Harbor and her now-husband, who also worked at the resort.

BY BILL BURKE



With decades of experience at Basin Harbor, Beverage and Outlets Manager Molly Goodyear welcomes guests back year after year.

As for Basin Harbor's bar program — it depends which bar you're talking about. The resort has 13 liquor licenses, and offers guests a range of destinations at which they can order a cocktail, from Ardelia's, a lakeside dining room that sources its menu locally; to the Red Mill, which also uses fresh, local ingredients in a rough-hewn, renovated saw mill; to North Dock Dinners, where guests can dine al fresco alongside Lake Champlain. In addition to a wide-ranging bar program, its wine offerings have also made it a longtime and repeat Wine Spectator award winner.

Describe your bar program.

Sarah: "We have 13 liquor licenses. We've got a cruise boat that can accommodate up to 48 people. We've got our lakeside bar — The Burgee Bar. We've got a lounge outside our formal dining room, the bar in one of our dining venues poolside does more beer and wine. We ebb and flow through different locations. When it's warmer at the lake, people can get a drink outside. When it's cooler, people want a hot toddy inside at the Champlain Lounge. If we have a flat piece of lawn where we can put a six-foot table, we're putting a bar there."

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Ginger-Peach Sangria

courtesy Basin Harbor

Batched recipe — serves 6

¾ pound of fresh peaches
 ¼ pound Granny Smith apples
 1 bottle ginger beer
 1 pint raspberries
 ¼ cup of cointreau
 ¼ cup white rum
 1 750ML bottle of white or rose wine
 6 ounces of peach schnapps

Pour in a pitcher for 24-48 hours covered.
 Enjoy over ice.



What was your first night behind the bar like?

Molly: “I moonlighted behind the bar last summer during COVID-19 because there was a lack of employees. I don’t quite remember everything, but I had to do a lot of faking. It was a different kind of scenario because people couldn’t sit at the bar — we had it roped off and it was a single-file situation. With that kind of setup, it was never a crazy night at the bar. It was manageable for someone who doesn’t typically bartend.”

Sarah: “Molly is being bashful. She often hosts social events, and she is a consummate hostess and understands how to take care of people. As a bartender, you get into that relationship of, ‘what do you need and how can I help you?’ Molly has that.”

What do you like most about your job?

Molly: “It’s certainly a challenge right now, and there’s never a boring situation. It’s fast paced and it’s very high energy. It’s been an interesting ride, that’s for sure.”

Sarah: “I would say the people. It’s not only our guests, who return year after year, but our staff who return year after year. It’s so rewarding to see a smile on someone’s face. It gives you such a sense of accomplishment. We hire people for their personalities here at Harbor Basin, and train for skills. We have good people here, and it feels good to come in and be part of that team.”

What makes Basin Harbor special?

Molly: “It’s the people. We have families returning year after year, and some of them are third- and fourth-generation families who are bringing kids and grandkids back. A good many of us have been here for 10-plus years, and we know these families and greet them and have friendships with them that last through the years. Most of these people we didn’t see last year because of COVID, but we’re now seeing the return of our legacy guests.”

Sarah: “Basin Harbor isn’t corporate and it’s not stuffy. We can recognize that we might set something up on paper and execute, and if it’s not working correctly, we can change it. It’s not always comfortable to pivot mid-season, but if a guest or an employee has a suggestion, we try to work it. We realize that good and bad feedback is a gift, and operationally, that’s the family aspect and compassion in our business.”

“In terms of our location, we’re on an unparalleled slice of heaven on Lake Champlain, on a nearly 700-acre parcel of land. We look out over Adirondack State Park, which means it will never be developed. We very much view ourselves as stewards of the land.”

“Our accommodations don’t have televisions, which means guests come to interact with other guests. They love seeing the staff here. We put our staff members’ state or country of origin on their name tags to encourage conversation — you may hear, ‘I went to Paraguay just last year,’ from a guest. We really want to personalize the experience here.”

Share a bartending secret.

Sarah: “It’s really *mise en place* — understanding your customer and your location. A lot of our bartenders are cross trained, so one day they may be at a casual beer and wine bar, and the next they could be at a bar making Manhattans and martinis. It’s knowing your equipment, knowing what you’re coming into. You’ll be more successful if you know where everything is instead of looking around for your tools. Fortune favors the prepared.”

What advice would you give to an aspiring bartender?

Sarah: “Say yes, and the opportunity will present itself. A lot of people start out here moving tables, they may express an interest and then they’ll spend time as a barback. Then they may move up to a beer and wine bar before moving up to a real bar. Be available and have a good attitude, put yourself in an environment where you can learn. Be the go-to person on your team.”

If you weren’t doing this, what would you be doing?

Molly: “I have my own business I put to the side to return to Basin Harbor — I took a seven-year hiatus and came back at end of 2019. I would be managing my other business, 802 Social. It’s a social media management company.”

Sarah: “My role at the resort, I call it ‘cruise director’ because I’m always making sure people are efficient with their planning and schedules, so they don’t miss out on activities. I love that and I love to hike in my free time. I’d like to incorporate that into some sort of adventure travel with food and beverage. That would be right up my alley.” ☺