

Ali Nagle: The Heart of the Monkey House



GM brings love of Winooski to her accidental career

Sometimes a career finds you by accident. Take Ali Nagle, general manager of The Monkey House bar and music venue in Winooski.

Nagle learned bartending on the job. She started hanging out at the Monkey when she was dating her now-husband, Brian Nagle, who started working there. She picked up some part-time hours at the bar checking IDs and collecting money for

the bands. The need for another bartender led to some on-the-job training on Friday and Saturday nights, and Nagle added bartending to her skill set. It took some time to master, but she's an old pro now. A sociology and anthropology major at her alma mater, St. Michael's College, Nagle says she had planned to become "some type of social worker." But the 36-year-old has management chops and has found her niche, using her degree every time she walks into the bar.

"I always joke with people, like, this is why I do what I do," she says. "It's so good. You just hear so many good stories. Some are sad, of course, and people are having a tough time right now. But you just hear so much gossip and drama, it's great and it's not your own. And then people know nothing about you really, but you know their whole life or parts of their lives. It's pretty good. It is a perk of the job."

Nagle was promoted to general manager at the Monkey in 2013 and hasn't looked back. She and her husband Brian are also part of the five-person team that organizes the Waking Windows music festival in Winooski each year (see accompanying feature, pg. 6). Along with originators Paddy Reagan, Marc Mavadones and Matt Rogers, the team is hoping to stage the mammoth, three-day event featuring more than 70 acts the weekend of May 13-15. Cancelled the last two years due to the pandemic, this year's festival marks the 10th anniversary of Waking Windows — two years late. The number of bands booked this year is substantially lower than previous years, and proof of vaccination will be required, but organizers are hoping COVID cooperates enough to pull it all off.

"Yeah, we're downsizing a bit on the number of bands, and a little bit on the number of stages we have, mostly due to COVID and not really knowing what things are going to look like," Nagle says. "I think we're looking pretty good. I don't want to jinx it, but we wanted to put more focus on the outside stages depending on people's comfort level being inside at that point. So, we are downsizing a bit this year, but it's still a ridiculous amount of bands, DJs, special events and comedians."

Nagle not only manages The Monkey House and helps organize the Waking Windows festival, she also manages the bar's catering service, Fluid Bar Service. Owned and operated by Monkey House owners Ryan and Caroline Smith, Fluid Bar Service partners with different food, beverage, transportation and event venues to cater weddings and more.

Nagle says she has been doing more bar catering work through Fluid Bar than at The Monkey House itself, where she only tends bar on Friday nights. Still, bartending is her jam.

"I love it, it's super fun," she says. "When we're busy, you're just cranking all over the place."

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