

Beverage Baron



Owner Bob Harrington with son and managing partner Casey Harrington

When Bob Harrington and his former partner Chuck Hinton began planning what would become the longtime Barre staple, the Beverage Baron, more than 28 years ago, they had a very clear vision of what they wanted the store to become.

“Our mission has always been to give the customer a pleasant experience in our store,” Harrington, who bought Hinton out in 2008, says. “I’m sure everybody tries to do that, but we try to help the customer as much as possible — and that has never changed.”

Despite a fire in 1994 and a flood in 2011 (no reports of any earthquakes, yet), the store has flourished thanks to Harrington’s vision.

“Whether it’s putting together a large order for a special event or carrying a special item or even helping someone carry their order out, we will always take the extra step to give them that positive experience,” Harrington says.

Harrington runs the store with his son and

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managing partner Casey, and first opened the doors to the Beverage Baron in 1990 as a bottle redemption center. In 1995 the store was awarded a liquor contract and three years later he moved it all out to Route 302, a location the store owner describes as “very busy, with a lot more traffic.”

Since then, Harrington and his team have kept the 8,000 square-foot store stocked and busy.

“I’ve seen a lot of changes in the industry,” he says. “I’ve been in it for 28 years, so I’ve seen a lot of changes in the product mix to expansion in items like vodkas and beer. But the one

thing that’s never changed is our mission.”

Harrington started in the wholesale business, which gave him a unique perspective. He had the opportunity to visit many stores and get a look at how they operated, how they treated customers and what they did to make the store successful.

“We’re friendly,” he says of his staff. “There are people who have been coming in over the course of the past 28 years, and I don’t think of them as customers — I think of them as friends. I enjoy having conversations with people.”

Yet it’s not only the regulars who reap the

benefits of Harrington's approach to doing business.

"I enjoy the people, but I also enjoy my help," he says. "It's the staff as much as anything."

A team of 24 people help keep the Beverage Baron running — some full-time, some part-time — with one, receiver Earl "Junior" Alexander, putting together 28 years of service at the store.

"If someone comes in looking for a beverage or a particular product, we'll go out of our way to find it. If it's a special order, we'll keep it here for them. Not everybody will do that."

Step inside the Beverage Baron and the store's liquor agency greets you just to the left, with a large Vermont products section — featuring both Green Mountain State-produced liquor and other locally produced items. Customer favorites include Barr Hill Gin and Whistle Pig Rye Whiskey, Harrington says — along with anything maple flavored.

"People are very much in tune with anything maple flavored," he says. "It's got to be a good product or they'll try it once and never touch it again."

It's that attention to detail that has helped keep the Beverage Baron healthy. A strong contingent of customers have followed the store from its original location, seen it through the fire and the flood and remained loyal for nearly three decades.

"We have a lot of loyal customers," Harrington says. "We're local. We do a lot of volume, but we're not really a tourist center. We deal mostly with locals from Barre and the surrounding area. We're on a highway where there are people coming and going, but there are no attractions in town like a ski area or anything like that. We're dealing with local people more than tourists — people who make this an everyday stop, whether it's for gas or milk or beer or spirits. We're the local store for beverages."

After years of getting into the store at 6 a.m., Harrington has slowed his pace. ("I'm kicking back a bit more now; I'm semi-retired.") He'll spend his free time atop snow machines or on a pontoon boat at the family camp on Lake Champlain. Still, the Beverage Baron is never far from his thoughts.

"You make friends with the people that come in," he says. "And then you just want to give them that same level of service every time." 🍹

Beverage Baron

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