

The Old Brick Store



Store Owner Whitney Finley

If there was an official Vermont embassy to greet visitors as they stepped off the Lake Champlain Ferry in Charlotte, it would be in the nearly 166-year-old brick structure just up Ferry Road from McNeil Cove.

That welcoming destination, which has been providing for residents and visitors in this small Chittenden County town since 1853, is known appropriately — and simply — as The Old Brick Store. And anyone from the area knows it as such, including owner Whitney Finley, who has a bit of history with the place.

"I worked here when I was in high school," Finley says while rushing around the store on a busy Friday morning. "I was a cashier and I worked in the deli."

Finley bought The Old Brick Store in 2014 and became the latest caretaker of the regional icon. "It's always been a part of town," she says. "It's been here since 1853."

And if someone would've told the high-school-aged Finley that she would one day own the store described as "a convenience store with a conscience?"

"I probably would not have believed them," she says, laughing.

Yet step inside and you'll likely see the Charlotte native and mother of three (soon to be four) at work. She may be stocking shelves, working with the house-made pizza dough or whipping up her specialty in the store's bakery.

"We're probably best known for our baked goods," says Finley, who learned her craft at the New England Culinary Institute. "It's one of the main things we get comments on. And of those, we're probably best known for our scones and cookies."

Cross the porch that sits out front, and whose benches are often populated with a few regulars enjoying coffee, and those

baked items would be among the first things encountered. The open floor plan is ringed by groceries, Vermont-produced items and drinks. The brick walls and wooden floors lend an authenticity that can't be manufactured, and offer a welcoming feel that locals and visitors immerse themselves in when they gather each morning.

"We have a lot of regulars," Finley says. "A lot of people have meetings here, or they'll sit and have breakfast as they work on their computer. It can have a real coffee house vibe. Then we've got workmen who come in for lunch and short breaks."

In the summer, the clientele changes and the number of customers swells. The town is home to three cottage communities, leading to a seasonal population that bolsters the year-round regulars who stop in each day. Visitors can either look for the sign hanging over the green awning, or spot the eye-catching clock that sits over the end of the building. A large



timepiece with wings and ringed by seemingly random items representing hours and minutes, it's become an instantly identifiable landmark signaling to passersby that they've arrived. It, too, has been a part of the The Old Brick Store for many years.

"It's been there for as long as I can remember," Finley says of the unique but not-quite-functional piece of art. "But it doesn't currently work."

It's just another endearing quirk about the place. There are convenience store chains that would exhaust marketing budgets in an attempt to recreate the authenticity built into the DNA of The Old Brick Store, whose long line of workers (there are currently nine employees) and clientele over the years have seen historical moments ranging from the Civil War to the Great Depression to the moon landing.

"It's crazy to think about how long it's been here," Finley says. "I haven't seen any historical images from inside the store, but it was once smaller and it sold gas. It also sold a lot of meats and cheeses — like a butchery."

The liquor agency, which greets people as soon as they come through the front door, features a carefully curated selection of Vermont spirits atop shelving built by Finley's husband, Erich, as well as a variety of liquor that would help stock any home bar.

"We have a lot of Vermont products," the store owner says. "We carry a good selection and everybody seems pleased with it."

Just don't ask her to choose a favorite after-work sipper from the relatively new addition to the store — Finley's fourth child is due in February. Until then, however, she'll continue to keep the store running and provide a place for residents to meet and catch up.

"That's my favorite part of this — interacting with customers," Finley says. "There are a lot of really nice people in town, and you get to know a lot of your neighbors by coming in here. They're people you might not otherwise get to know, necessarily." ☺

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