

# Olney's General Store

It's likely that anyone in the Orleans area looking for a specific spirit or Vermont-made liqueur knows Josh Olney.

On the off chance they don't know Josh, they probably know one of the eight team members who help run Olney's General Store — a fixture in town, and one of the only state liquor agencies in the area, and one that has welcomed visitors to the Northeast Kingdom town and a steady stream of regulars for many years. And that's just how Olney would have it.

"Everybody knows everybody here," Olney says of the easy familiarity he has with customers. "And the fact that the employees know the clientele helps. They know your name when you come through the front door. It's a small town, so there are only a couple of stores here. It has a history — it's one of those places that's been around forever under different owners, but it's been a staple of the community for a long time."

And they do come through the door. Especially at lunchtime. Olney's General Store sits across Main Street from the Ethan Allen Furniture manufacturer, and when the noontime hour strikes, groups of hungry workers make their way to the store for a midday meal.

"Our go-to, I'd say, is the steak and cheese," Olney says. "And our breakfast sandwiches. We're open all day, but that is a key item."

The Derby Line native, father of two (Olney has a son, Cooper, 14, and a daughter, Addison, 10, with his wife, Amanda) and current Waterbury resident, has owned the store for two years, buying it from previous owner Peter Lanoue when the situation presented itself. A longtime patron of the store, he found himself in the enviable position of taking it over.

"My other job is at the Orleans Country Club," Olney, the club's golf pro, says. "This is my seventh season coming up. I live in Waterbury now, so I'd commute through Orleans and spend time here. I'd frequent the store and I got to know him (Lanoue), and I knew he was looking to sell."

When Olney bought the store in July of 2017, he set about making a number of improvements — including adding lunchtime options for people in town.

"We increased the deli area and its menu offerings, and we increased the wine and craft beer selections," he says. "As far as renovations go, we did a lot of general renovations to the



deli and kitchen area and the back section of the store, which is where the liquor store is. We did close to a complete renovation to that part of the store."

When visitors step inside the store, the deli and register sits just to the right. Straight head is the grocery and soda and beer coolers, and a coffee station sits just to the left. The liquor agency takes up the back of the store.

"Right now it's horseshoe shaped with the shelving, but it's in the process of being changed a little," he says. "It takes up the entire right side of the back of the store, and we've got some newly added space that we created where we're going to offer expanded liquor offerings, a wine selection and more Vermont products."

Olney's General Store has a strong Green

Mountain vibe throughout. A number of locally produced spirits fill a special section of the liquor agency, (Barr Hill Gin and Borden Valley Spirits are among the most popular), and with Lake Willoughby and the Willoughby and Barton Rivers located nearby, the store provides visitors with hunting and fishing necessities. During the Steelhead and trout runs, Olney's becomes a place where outdoorsmen mingle with residents, tourists, workers and regulars.

"I like the small town feel," Olney says of his connection to the Green Mountain State. "I like being a locally-owned establishment that employs local people. There's a real sense of community here." ☒

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