

# Putting the Spotlight on Vermont

Maplewood Vermont Travelers Service Information Center Promotes, Celebrates the Green Mountain State



One of the interesting things about the Maplewood Vermont Travelers Service Information Center, in Berlin, is that on a typical day, there's nothing all that typical.

"If you come in here, you're likely to see a little league team getting creemees on a Thursday night in the summer or a family of four stopping in for pizza on their way to Montreal," says Co-Owner Wayne Lamberton. "It's a mix of everything."

Located just off exit 7 on I-89, the 12,000-square-foot Maplewood — open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year — serves a variety of purposes for a diverse clientele. Guests can find, among other things, ice cream, sandwiches, pizza, craft beer, liquor and wine, dairy, and since Vermont runs through Maplewood's DNA, anything maple-flavored.

"There are daily specials and there's always chicken fingers and cheeseburgers and chicken sandwiches and such prepared and ready to go," Lamberton says. "There's a deli and a seating area, and a window to order custom foods — anything you want. You can get an

omelet in the morning or a meatball sub in the afternoon."

Lamberton has his own favorite, however. "The Thanksgiving wrap is very good," he says, before noting that he attempts to avoid over-indulging. "I try not to get one every week, though."

Maplewood Vermont Travelers Service Information Center is a public-private partnership, dedicated Oct. 14, 2016, as a collaboration between the Vermont Dept. of Buildings and General Services, the Vermont Agency of Transportation and Maplewood LLC, of Berlin, Vermont, with support from the Federal Highway Administration and the Vermont Dept. of Tourism and Marketing. It's precursor, the Maplewood Convenience Store, was originally built in 1985. Lamberton and his partner, Randy LaGue, acquired it in 2009, along with the nearby Comfort Inn. Since then it's become one of the more welcoming stops along I-89.

A tall, glass and wood exterior leads into a bright, welcoming space with plenty of natural light and soaring ceilings. A massive slab of granite in the vestibule, donated by Rock of Ages Granite Quarry, features a sandblasted mural of a farmer collecting sap with his horses. Walk past that granite mural and into the building itself, and a wide range of food and beverage options are on offer among an impressive display of Vermont's past.

"We have banners down each side of the building and on each column that are Vermont Life Magazine covers," Lamberton says. "We have pictures of everything from Thunder Road Speedbowl to Camel's Hump to various pictures from the archives — flowers blooming in front of the State House, things like that."

With its ideal location just off the interstate, it serves as an authentic taste of the Green Mountain State for travelers passing through, with an emphasis on Vermont-created products — from food to gifts to spirits. The newly opened liquor agency is located just inside the main entrance, and puts the spotlight on spirits crafted nearby.

A quick look at the shelves reveals a lineup

of Vermont spirits: Barr Hill Gin and the Reserve Tom Cat Gin; a variety of Smugglers' Notch vodka, gin and whiskey; Metcalfe's raspberry, maple and blueberry spirits; and a range of WhistlePig rye offerings, among many others.

"The liquor agency opened just before Christmas this past year," Lamberton says. "It's probably a couple hundred square feet, and the prominent side of the liquor shelving is all Vermont products."

It may be that connection (Lamberton, a Vermont native, was born and brought up in the central part of the state) that local residents find endearing. Though there are plenty of people who stop in on their way through the state, Maplewood enjoys a loyal local clientele.

"I bet it's 70% local business," he says. "I think the local business has increased substantially since we opened the travel center, and that's a pleasant surprise. I didn't know what would happen, but we have a very supportive and strong community, and I think it has grown as much as our out-of-town business."

Those who are from elsewhere discover much more than the typical highway rest stop.

"I think our success comes from providing a service like no other in Vermont," Lamberton says. "I think whether it's to get fuel or use a

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restroom at 2 a.m. or a local needing lunch or it's someone headed home after work for the weekend and they need a bottle of gin, we can take care of all those needs.

"I also think it's that we're hands-on owners and we're in the store every day," Lamberton says. "We've also got a great leadership group. I think everyone within our core really cares about the store and customer service and being the best we can be."

**Maplewood Vermont Travelers Service Information Center**  
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BY BILL BURKE