



Aerosmith First Played Here:

Fireside Beverage lays claim to rock and roll history

Fireside Beverage staff, left to right: Zach Thomas and Buffy Girard, who co-own the store with Zach's stepfather, Russ Girard, General Manager Gardner Sinclair and Shift Manager Tammy O'Brien. Photo by David Seaver

When Zach Thomas's family decided to expand their craft beer store, Fireside Beverage in Ascutney, to also include Vermont spirits, they didn't realize they were on the cusp of owning a piece of rock and roll history.

BY ROBERT COOK

They had just purchased an old, abandoned building on Route 5 that used to be the Savage Beast bar. "When we tore down four layers of drywall, we found the backdrop to the stage," Zach said.

It turns out the first ever performance with the current line of Aerosmith was held on that stage in 1971. Their gig at the former Savage Beast marked the first time that Steven Tyler, Joe Perry, Joey Kramer, Tom Hamilton and their new-

est member Brad Whitford ever played together.

As a huge Aerosmith fan, Zach was in awe. "It was awesome."

Zach also said that Joe Perry's Instagram page posted this fact in 2019. "We tried to save that wall to incorporate it into the new wall, but we weren't able to do it," Zach said. "To be associated with anything Aerosmith, no matter how little or big Aerosmith, is pretty cool."

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Fireside Beverage, agency store 2037, can claim something that no other agency store in Vermont can claim: their new store was the site of a former bar that launched Aerosmith, the most successful American rock band in history. To date, the band has sold more than 150 million records worldwide and 85 million here in the U.S.

When one looks at the proximity between Ascutney and Sunapee, NH, where Aerosmith founders Tyler and Perry first met, it is very believable that the band they would form in 1970 would

seek out nearby gigs to hone their sound and style. Tyler and Perry first met in 1970 when they were working at an ice cream parlor on Lake Sunapee.

Zach said that he is originally from Claremont, NH, and he recalls how he and his dad would go fishing in Sunapee and his dad would point out Steven Tyler's house.

Zach said he, his stepdad, Ross Girard, and his mom, Buffy, have discussed ideas on how they could best highlight their store's connection to the legendary rock band. Zach said he has even reached out to the band, but has not heard back from anyone yet. When they opened their full-service craft beer, wine and Vermont spirits agency store in April, Zach said he created a Facebook and Instagram video that featured Aerosmith's "Back in the Saddle."

Beyond its connection to Aerosmith, Zach points out that Fireside Beverage is creating a stellar reputation of its own as a friendly, local retailer that offers its customers affordable prices on all of its



Aerosmith is pictured here in 1971 after finalizing the lineup that played its first ever gig at the former Savage Beast bar in Ascutney where Fireside Beverage is now located.



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STORE SPOTLIGHT

products — especially Vermont craft beer and spirits.

He said Fireside Beverage has been in business for four years. “We had just been a small craft beer and wine store” inside the family’s camp store that his parents owned in Windsor, Zach explained. “We purchased the Windsor Wine and Spirits in November 2021” and closed the week before Christmas.

In April, they moved to their new location at 6220 Route 5 in Ascutney. Their decision to expand their product line to include Vermont spirits was not even on their radar. Zach said he has always been a huge craft beer enthusiast.

The location they purchased had been a rundown, abandoned building that once housed a butcher shop and hair salon. “We ended up taking down the old building and the old foundation and put up a brand new building,” Zach said.

Zach said they wanted to make the move for some time before they purchased the Windsor store. “It was just a matter of being in the right place in the right time.”

Before the expansion, Zach said their craft beer and wine products sold extremely well during the summer and fall tourism season, but sales would drop off in the winter and early spring.

While Zach notes that “Vermont is the mecca of craft beer,” he also said that people don’t tend to drink it as much in the winter as they do in the summer when they are enjoying barbecues and other outdoor activities.

With the ski crowd not far away at Sunapee, Zach wanted to position his store to capture year-round sales.

“If we’re jumping in, we’re jumping in head first,” Zach said.

He said the future may be even brighter because Mount Ascutney, which is currently open-limited skiing, may soon expand to become a full-service mountain. Mount Sunapee is just 45 minutes away from their store. “I hope it’s true,” Zach said.

Fireside Beverage General Manager Gardner Sinclair coordinates their 802Spirits stores and works closely with the Department of Liquor and Lottery coordinators to



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help the State meet its liquor sales goals.

Zach also takes pride in his store's commitment to promote and sell spirits crafted by smaller Vermont distillers. "Any chance we can give back to those other people who are putting their best foot forward, we try," Zach said. "We push all things Vermont."

Vermont distillers are making a name for themselves and as a fellow, small family-owned business, Zach said they want to support them. "If we can give back in any way, that's what we are about."

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Building and maintaining a loyal and local customer fan base is key to enjoying year-round success, Zach said.

"I believe in Karma, so while you definitely have the opportunity in this business to price gauge people if you want to, I am dead set against price gauging," Zach said.

As a consumer, Zach understands what he would pay or would not pay for a product. "The last thing we want to do is be a burden on people's wallets," Zach said. "Having trust with your customers is what will keep them coming back."

Now that Fireside Beverage has found its home, Zach plans to stay there for a long time. Like many Vermont family-owned businesses, Zach, 32, would like to see his store passed down to other generations to keep it going.

It's a safe bet Fireside Beverage will be a mainstay in the Windsor-Scutney area for the foreseeable future to the delight of local residents and visitors alike.

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