

CHARTLEY LIQUORS



CHARTLEY LIQUORS NAVIGATING A COURSE INTO THE FUTURE

BY TEDDY DURGIN

A lot of packaged goods stores pride themselves on their customer service. Chartley Liquors in Reisterstown is proud of its customer relationships.

"We have been in the same location for 24 years," said owner Nick Vitale, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*. "During that time, we've grown to know our customers and their families in a very close and personal way," added Tricia Vitale (Nick's wife and co-owner). "Our customers enjoy being greeted by their first name. Our staff makes them feel welcome, and we give them the special attention and service. No matter how small or large their purchase is, they're all treated equally. I find it very true that what you give of yourself comes back to you tenfold whether it's a smile, a kindness . . . but, most importantly, loyalty!"

Chartley Liquors is named after the boulevard on which it is located. Vitale describes his core clientele as middle class local residents, hard working families, and single people who mostly purchase the same product over and over

again.

Keeping products on the shelves has definitely been a challenge throughout the pandemic. Liquor stores in Maryland were fortunate to be considered "essential businesses" by the Hogan administration, so Chartley and many of its competitors have actually fared very well during the crisis. "Sometimes we were overwhelmed by the number of customers coming into the store," Nick noted. "Not a bad situation to be in, but initially it was challenging to require our customers to wear masks and social distance while shopping in the store. Everyone now understands what is required."

Tricia continued, "We carry masks in our store so they are available to customers who need them. We also have floor markings to assist with social distance guidelines, and we employ extra cleaning measures to ensure the safety and health

of our customers and staff."

When asked what his biggest challenge has been since mid-March, both husband and wife quickly replied, "time management." To be successful as a small business owner in any time period, one has to be willing to sacrifice personal commitments. Vitale says, "It is very challenging to make time for other aspects of your life. When you own a business, you're married to it! You have to learn to adjust to long hours and schedule your life around them. I guess we're doing something right. It's been 24 years, and all of us (the store and our marriage) are still together!"

Fortunately, the pluses frequently outweigh the minuses. "The favorite part of our job is definitely working with the customers," both Vitale's agreed. "They are what keep the business thriving. Tricia and I are certainly both 'people persons' and want to be pleasers. It's our core policy to make sure the customer is happy with their service and to make sure they have what they need. When a customer tells us that they passed three liquor stores to

see us, I know we're doing something right!"

Nevertheless, obstacles remain. Some are temporary problems that need to be solved as they occur. Other issues require more long-time fixes. "One of the biggest threats to the business is the possibility of chain store licensing," Nick states. "We've spent the last 24 years investing in this business not only monetarily, but through blood, sweat, and tears. If legislation passes that would allow chain stores to sell beer and wine, my business would not survive. I know that I can't fight this fight alone! My hope is that all liquor stores will join me in being a member of their local affiliate or a direct MSLBA member. We need them to help us in this fight."

Association membership has indeed been extremely important to Vitale over the years. Chartley's membership in the Baltimore County Licensed Beverage Association (BCLBA) also gives them membership in the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA) and American Beverage Licensees (ABL).

"I have representation at all levels of government," Nick states. "Locally, BCLBA has fought on numerous occasions to protect my business and the value of my liquor license. They have worked hard to build relationships with our local legislators and educate them on the alcohol industry. BCLBA has also helped us through COVID-19 challenges by providing resources to help small businesses survive."

He adds, "As a small business owner, there is no way I would have the time nor the knowl-



Nick and Tricia Vitale, happily married to each other and Chartley Liquors in Reisterstown.

edge of what is happening through local, state, and national legislation that could harm my business. They keep me informed and educated on important alcohol related issues. These groups look out for my interests, my business, my livelihood. Without their guidance, I doubt that I would still be in business." ■

Are You a Member of MSLBA, Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association?

MSLBA members are Maryland beer, wine & spirits retailers representing bars, clubs, restaurants & stores on alcohol beverage issues. They know their best chance for competently and successfully dealing with external forces such as legislation, regulation, suppliers, enforcement agencies, prohibition efforts, and unfair competition, is by joining MSLBA with other independent retailers for reputable representation.



Message from Nick Vitale of Chartley Liquors:

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MSLBA—Representing Alcohol Beverage Licensees since 1950

Contact MSLBA for Membership Information:

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