



# OLIVER'S OLD TOWNE TAVERN

## NEW LIFE AT THE OLD TOWNE, THANKS TO LENNY WOHLFARTH

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLI MIX

**F**or a bar or restaurant that has been around as long as Oliver's Old Towne Tavern, there are bound to be some bad days mixed in with many good ones over the years. December 24, 2022, was a very bad day. Marylanders will remember that this past Christmas Eve saw temperatures freakishly dip down into the single digits. Santa Claus came to town that night and found Laurel was just as cold as the North Pole. And earlier that day, Oliver's got a big, old lump of coal in its stocking in the

form of a burst water pipe that resulted in this Laurel landmark being shut down for more than two months.

The memory is still raw for owner-operator Lenny Wohlfarth, who recalled to the Beverage Journal, "The temperatures had indeed dropped into single digits. There actually were quite a few properties in the Laurel area that suffered similar damage. I can't verify this, but one of our firefighters said they had had at least 150 calls for pipes and various things like that. We opened up at Noon because there was a lot of football on TV that day. Around 2:30-3 o'clock in the afternoon, my wife [Pamela Wohlfarth] who was working and the other staff noticed that water was coming out from some of the light fixtures in the back of the bar. So, they started bringing trash cans and buckets. Even some customers were grabbing pails and anything

**Lenny Wohlfarth**  
*Owner-Operator*  
**Oliver's Old Towne Tavern**

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they could do to help.”

He continued, “I contacted the property manager for the building and told her it looked to me like it might be the sprinkler system. We could shut down water in the building, but we don’t have access to the sprinkler shut-off. That’s in a utility room next to us. While they were attempting to get that shut off, the pipe that had burst had been running for a good 30 to 40 minutes before we could get it shut off. Around 3 p.m. or so, the ceiling collapsed into the restaurant. That caused damage to the ceilings obviously, the floors, and the walls. Quite a number of electrical issues were impacted, too.”

The Wohlfarths and other staffers were thankfully nowhere near the impacted ceilings when they burst. “We have to consider ourselves fortunate that nothing worse happened. You can always get new stuff.”

Oliver’s Old Towne Tavern is an eating and drinking place that has prided itself on having “old stuff” for many years. This local neighborhood bar has, in some form or another, been operating since the 1950s. The location is actually a trolley station that dates back to 1908. “So, there is generational history at the location,” Wohlfarth noted. “There are customers who have come for years and years, and we also now serve their kids and their grandkids. We know a lot of people who walk through the door each day. You know you’ll see a particular

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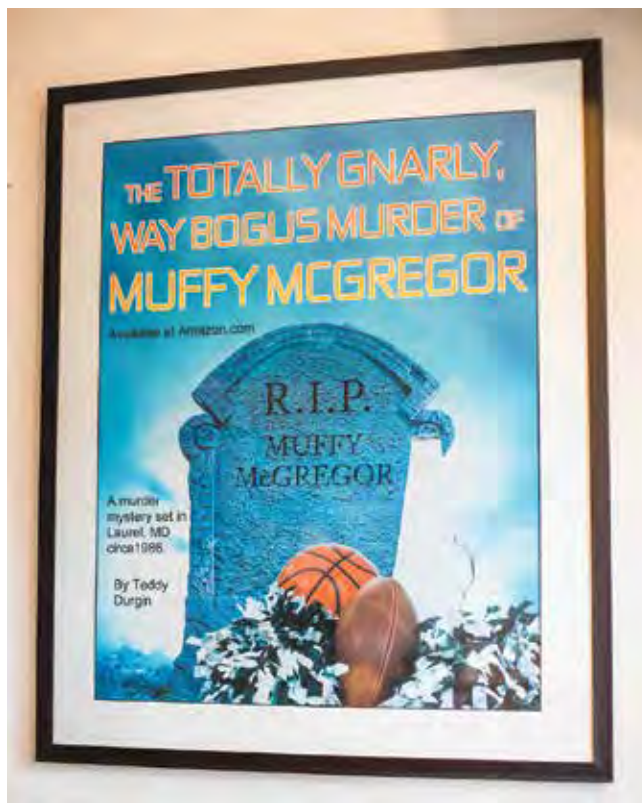
friend here every Tuesday or someone who comes in at some point every weekend.”

As Laurel around Oliver’s has built up and given way to chain restaurants, modern architecture, and big swathes of new housing, Oliver’s has stayed largely the same. People who move away from Laurel come back to visit and eat and drink only at Oliver’s. It’s that kind of place.

It’s located in Laurel’s historic district on Main Street. Wohlfarth noted, “What’s interesting about Oliver’s is because it’s historic, it does stand out from some of the buildings whose architecture has changed some to look a bit more modern. We’re a standalone building that just looks like it has been here for a while, even though the insides have changed to keep up with technology.”

On the positive side, Wohlfarth was able to use the shutdown to make some improvements. “We were able to install USB ports around the perimeter of the bar for people that have forgotten their block and need to charge their phone or tablets,” he said. “We were able to re-do our dartboard area, which had taken a pounding over the years from people . . . uh . . . [laughing] missing their targets. We’ve also made some improvements with the lighting. We took the time to make sure things were done correctly for the reopening.”

Still, there were many dark days between Dec. 24 and the March 1 reopening.



“The financial hit has been tremendous,” Wohlfarth lamented, just two days after Oliver’s once again opened its doors and welcomed back customers. “Our staff has been with me for a very long time. I’ve been here for a decade, and I have staff members who have been with me that entire time. So, I was concerned for them. But it’s been very nice. We’ve had several local groups like the American Legion as well as some customers who did some fundraising to get money distributed to the bartenders and the cooks and staff. I am very proud of the fact that we have everyone coming back. We had one person who moved away. But everyone else stayed, and it was so nice to see the loyalty.”

He added, “So many people expressed

concern with e-mails, text messages, messages on Facebook. There are customers I certainly know by name. But we have so many customers like ‘That chicken quesadilla guy’ who have reached out with offers of help, and now I know their names, too. I even had people – customers – volunteering with clean-up.”

And now Oliver’s is indeed back up and running. Wohlfarth is hoping to return to “normal” as soon as possible. But he, his wife, and staff are taking the time to do it right. Beverages, for instance: “We have worked with Breakthru Beverage. Shortly before the water pipe burst, they had worked out a program with their various Smirnoff products. Before the shutdown, we were doing very

well with that. We are a bar that typically has regular drinkers that get their Miller Lite or their Coors product or their Jack and Coke. But our rep from Breakthru sat down with me and came up with a nice promotion and attractive artwork, and we were doing pretty well with it. So, I’m going to start that back up once we get our feet under us again and make sure we can do all of the ‘regular stuff’ properly.”

Mostly, Wohlfarth is just glad to once again be able to commute to work with a smile on his face and a whistle on his breath. And he was very pleased to be part of this series of articles on historic bars and restaurants around Maryland and Washington, D.C., rather than actual history. He concluded, “I live a half-mile from Oliver’s, so I’ll walk to the restaurant. And within that half-mile, anywhere from two to six cars will honk and wave and yell ‘Hey, Lenny!’ or ‘I’ll see you later on tonight!’ I really love the fact that my wife and I have been able to keep a bona fide institution rolling along. There are so many places that pop up – whether it’s bar or restaurant or even a little bakery – that are franchises. To keep a ‘mom-and-pop’ going in this area and seeing the affection the customers have for the business is really nice and gives me a good feeling. We’ll keep on fighting the fight!” ■

