

FELLS POINT



Flourishing ... Far From Failing

By Doug Mace

Recent updates to Fell's Point have resulted in noted improvements in the landscape and overall atmosphere in one of Baltimore's oldest neighborhoods. With the variety of restaurants, boutique shops, and historic buildings lining the streets, the neighborhood remains one of the most dominant attractions in the city, for tourism and economic development. And for good reason.

Shaped and founded by William Fell in 1730, the original municipality combined with Baltimore Town and Jones Town to form Baltimore City in 1797, forever solidifying the rich history of the neighborhood that still remains a crucial part of Baltimore City to this day.

Standing in Fell's Point, there's a symbiotic sensory experience between the water

crashing against the docks, car tires chattering down the cobblestone streets, and the ever-present crowds wandering from restaurant, to shop, to bar; in no particular order.

Unfortunately, this beautiful area fell victim to some honest and deserved press regarding everything from events during Halloween celebrations in 2015, to the fatal shooting of Jim Forrester, a musician and tattoo artist at Baltimore Tattoo Museum. However, the image of how frequent the incidents occurred, and how dangerous the area remains, may not be quite so accurate.

Videos, images, and local news stories painted a picture of consistent violence, unruly behavior, and mischief. Meanwhile, the city and local entrepreneurs, such as Under Armour owner Kevin Plank, worked tirelessly to begin new development projects, while protecting the allure and integrity of one of Charm City's favorite neighborhoods.

FROM THOSE WHO KNOW IT BEST

Bars and restaurants like The Horse You Came in On and Bertha's Mussels are perennial favorites in Fell's Point. One Eye'd Mike's has changed hands without losing its draw, and new places have sprung up all around. Multiple boutique shops, an Under Armour store, and a variety of new restaurants and bars moved into Fell's over the last few years, adding to the multiplicity of things to see and do.

Bob Simko works as the Food and Beverage Manager at Max's Taphouse on Broadway Street, in the heart of Fell's Point. Throughout two decades of working at one of the best, if not what's widely considered *the best* beer bar in Baltimore, he's seen a lot of change in the local community.

Max's regularly helps local brewers get their beers on tap, and their names in front of consumers. Brewers like Peabody Heights,



Stillwater Artisanal Ales, and others found that Max's Taphouse keeps their fingers on the pulse of the city, providing somewhat of a beer delta. Ales flow through the taps and Marylanders enjoy from all over. If you want to make a name for yourself as a brewer or brewery, you start at Max's, or at least in Fell's Point.

Bob quickly gave a nod to the trials and



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tribulations ahead while pointing out the extraordinary potential for the area saying, "I think the future of Fell's point, the future of the tourist trade, the future of the city is definitely on the upswing. Baltimore has had its problems, it still has its problems. The elected officials have a huge hurdle in front of them."

When Max's and many other bars and restaurants decided to close down early for Halloween ~ one of the most profitable nights of the year in Fell's ~ the community, and its representatives, took note. Many owners of small businesses across Fell's Point decided to shut down early and reduce the risk of property damage and other liabilities, at the expense of losing hours of sales, and possible future customers.

The entire city felt, and continues to feel, the repercussions of the Freddie Gray case and many other instances of recent violence, resulting in a drop in tourism and leading to the unfortunate accolade of 'Most

Dangerous City' from *USA Today*.

Main Street Fell's Point Association President and owner of the boutique clothing shop Poppy & Stella, Kelley Heuisler puts it succinctly by saying, "We've seen a drop in people coming in from the counties." She continued to express how Fell's has always been a special place in Baltimore; a feeling shared by almost everyone living and working there.

Bob agreed, "I've found out through the years that its cyclical." He went on to describe Baltimore's neighborhoods and the ebb and flow of violence and prosperity.

"Baltimore has always been a 'watch-your-back' kind of city. Even way back twenty years ago I had my truck broken into three times, my bike was stolen; its city living."

The limelight is often a blessing and a curse when it comes to these kind of things. Whether a neighborhood is better or worse off is often left to the

eyes of the beholder.

"[The businesses and residents of Fell's Point] believe these are crimes of opportunity." Bob went on to say, "I think that Fell's Point is one of the few neighborhoods in Baltimore that, because of the tourism, and because of the history, gets put under the microscope a little bit more."

Kelley added, "The needs are different between a residential and commercial district. You do have additional strains on the system. The needs are just different. You do need more emphasis on trash clean-up, and the security piece is helpful."

With that said, most of the community feels like the area is safer now than ever before.

Kelley references the new Waterfront Partnership when she speaks of security and cleanliness efforts. A project that includes renovations, and security going forward for the area. One of the many reasons that Fell's has seen a strong resurgence and a major effort from small business owners.

Kelley added, in reference to the new security, "They're not there to replace the police, but they're extra eyes in the neighborhood. We're cleaner, greener and safer, but we still have the funky awesome dive bars, and great shopping, and awesome restaurants."

continued on page 50



FELLS POINT



continued from page 48

THE "REVITALIZATION"

From what was a major Baltimore City Police precinct, to what essentially became an abandoned shack, then the set for Homicide, the new Sagamore Pendry Hotel is one of Kevin Plank's many contributions. Arguably one of the most beautiful buildings in Baltimore, the renovation of a historic police precinct seems all too relevant to the beautification of a historic neighborhood perceived to be stricken by violence.

The Waterfront Partnership works cohesively with bars, boutiques, and other shops throughout Fell's Point giving several concerned voices the strength of a single, loquacious, exuberant, unified voice. By providing trash clean-up, security, a renovated Broadway Square and marketplace, and more, the Partnership provides a long overdue facelift.

Additionally, the city, along with Kevin Plank and Sagamore, helped to fund new water taxis to replace the outdated ones of old, and helped to plan additional stops, making travel across the harbor far more convenient. Each boat gives a tip-of-the-cap to the state's history with names like "Cal's Streak" and

"Key Anthem."

The thoughts going forward are all positive. With an emphasis on the future, and the hopes for prosperity, everyone seems excited to look ahead to the next phase in the history of Fell's Point.

Bob says it with exuberance, "Now that we have the new police commissioner and we have the Waterfront Partnership, I think they'll be no problems."

Patrick Russell, owner of Kooper's Tavern, Sláinte Irish Pub, and Woody's Cantina, is also a member of the Main Street Fell's Point Association and shows equal excitement over the series of improvements and specifically the beautification projects.

"I'm elated by what I've seen so far. And this is since January one. The neighborhood is spotless. There's no debris and trash and we've welcomed the Waterfront staff with open arms. Everybody treats them as if they're part of our

own staff."

Construction, violence, and unrest have seemingly deterred many people who live in the county from visiting, but both Patrick and Kelley pointed to making new and exciting events a focal point for the future of Fell's Point and its success. This effort leans toward attracting families and other locals to take a day trip and revisit the historic area.

Kelley points out that these events are a very targeted effort saying, "We're putting together more events throughout the year to really highlight the neighborhood. These events are really trying to use as many restaurants and businesses as possible in the neighborhood and highlight them as much as possible."

From what was a major Baltimore City Police precinct, to an abandoned structure, to the set for the hit TV series Homicide: Life on The Street, to the new Sagamore Pendry Hotel; the renovation of a historic police precinct seems all too relevant to the beautification of a historic neighborhood perceived to be stricken by violence.

A family-friendly light festival and the Privateer Festival in April, a Jazz festival on Mother's Day weekend, and a classic car show on Father's Day weekend, list just a few of the upcoming events.

For a long time Fell's Point has been one of the most storied, revered and beloved neighborhoods in Baltimore. Despite trials and tribulations that almost any area goes through at some time or another, the efforts have been made to change for the better and the results are evident.

Pervasive issues exist in almost every town or city in America, but the book should not always be judged by its cover. In this case, it seems that the outside looking in, isn't the whole story. In fact, it may be a small distorted example that hardly tells even a small portion of the story. The inside of a small bar, restaurant, or business in Fell's Point lends a much different novella of change and resilience. ■

