



FISHPAWS MARKETPLACE IN ARNOLD IS OFF THE HOOK

BY TEDDY DURGIN

Fishpaws Marketplace in Arnold, Md., features a unique tag line both in store and on its website: "It's not a shopping trip ... it's an experience!" And that is truth in advertising. This independently owned business has operated at the same location since before Prohibition. Today, it offers an extensive selection of imported and domestic wines; an assortment of craft, microbrew, imported, and domestic beers; and a broad array of liquors and gourmet cheeses and foods.

Kim Lawson is the proprietor. And she is a firm believer that experiential retail is the way to stand out in today's crowded and intensely competitive market. Touting her store's features, she said, "We have a 12-tap draft system to accommodate crowler and growler fills. We have a Napa Technology Wine Station -- we call it the Wine ATM -- which allows customers to sample one-, two-, and four-ounce pours at any time. And we employ a certified cheese specialist, who will assist you in pairing your cheese or charcuterie course with your beverage of choice."

Fishpaws also offers in-store tastings from all departments. In addition, Lawson and her staff offer special wine, beer, and spirit dinners and classes. "We pick one-

of-a-kind single barrel bourbons, whiskeys, and tequilas which our team personally select at distilleries," she added. "We then collaborate with breweries to age private-barrel, aged beers to offer on the growler station. And we participate in many off-site charity events, providing our unique products to offer fundraising opportunities."

But a lot of the fun has been sidelined due to the coronavirus pandemic. So far, Lawson and her staff have been up to the challenge. But there have definitely been changes and compromises.

"Our policies are changing daily as new guidelines are put in place by our governor," she stated. "We are social distancing with six-foot tape put down



throughout our store. We have limited our hours to let our team deep clean and stock nightly. We have new barriers around our registers to protect our cashiers. We have gloves, wipes, and hand sanitizer at every register, phone, computer, and work area. We also have a table at our entry for customers, offering gloves and a sanitizer liquid for their use." Fishpaws offers delivery service, too.

Lawson says her biggest challenge since the crisis began has been making decisions for the safety of her employees and just staying open to keep her staff employed and Fishpaws customers served. "We are so looking forward to returning to business as usual!" she said. "This has been extremely stressful, especially for my managers. I plan on doing something special for them ... not sure what yet. I'm definitely going to take them out for a relaxing dinner and probably give them some extra time off. We all just want to get back to normal soon."

It helps that she has been active for many years with the Anne Arundel County Licensed Beverage Association, and she is also a member of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA). Lawson remarked, "MSLBA is a great organization. I have learned so much from the other retailers that you interact with

from all over the state. That knowledge and idea exchange has been very important for my success. I believe being informed about the industry and the legislative process is important. Our industry is so dependent on the legislative process that we all really need to participate to protect our industry and businesses. I've developed such great personal and professional relationships through my involvement in the MSLBA."

In turn, Lawson is one of the association's most decorated members. She has twice been named Retailer of The Year by the National Association of Beverage Retailers in 1996 and 2016. And in 2014, Lawson with Fishpaws Marketplace was selected as the Small Business Administration's Family Owned Small Business for Maryland.

In times of both success and hardship, she remembers the words of wisdom her parents, Brad and Chris Lawson, imparted on her. They were entrepreneurs also, owning gift stores and other retail outlets. She concluded, "They taught me I could accomplish anything if



you worked hard and were fair. They also taught me the need to know how to do every job that you ask your staff to do." ■



Is Your Establishment a Member of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA)?

Message from Kim Lawson of Fishpaws Marketplace:

"Our industry is so dependent on the legislative process that we all really need to participate to protect our industry and businesses. I've developed such great personal and professional relationships through my involvement in the MSLBA."

MSLBA is the multicultural, go-to organization for Maryland retail alcohol beverage industry issues. No matter how proficient you are at the operations and management of your business, many factors influencing your success are outside your direct control. Your best chance for competently and successfully dealing with external forces such as legislation, regulation, suppliers, enforcement agencies and prohibition efforts, is by joining with other retailers for reputable representation through MSLBA.

Contact MSLBA for Membership Information:

Phone: (410) 871-1377 • **FAX:** (410) 871-2545 • **E-Mail:** MSLBAmembers@msn.com

Please provide the following:

Name of County or City Alcohol Licensing Board for Your Establishment: _____

Your Name: _____ Phone: () _____

Business Name: _____

Business Physical Address: _____