



O' LORDANS IRISH PUB

HISTORY IN ALL THE RIGHT WAYS

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | IMAGES BY ASHLI MIX PHOTOGRAPHY

We are continuing our series on historic and/or noteworthy bars, taverns, and restaurants around Maryland and Washington, D.C., and O'Lordans Irish Pub in downtown Westminster certainly qualifies. The establishment has been such a local fixture for decades that one doesn't even think twice before casually referring to it as "the historic O'Lordans Irish Pub in downtown Westminster."

The grand, old stone building first appeared on local maps between 1867 and 1870. It opened first as a foundry. Over the years, it has served as a barber shop, a live chicken house, and the old Stone House Restaurant owned and operated by the Sharkey family in the 1930s. It was a coffee shop in the 1980s before closing for many years and eventually being purchased by the Johansson family. Following a renovation to bring it up to modern standards, the building reopened as O'Lordans Irish Pub on Oct. 25, 2005.

General Manager Cody Snyder enjoys running an establishment with such history and prestige. "We have really tried to make the interior very 'authentic Irish,'" she said during a recent interview with the Beverage Journal. "Each room has its own personality. The downstairs is

Cody Snyder
General Manager
O'Lordans Irish Pub

set up like your traditional Irish pub. Dark woods, stone, and a working wood-burning fireplace. The first-floor back room is called The Crofter's Cottage, and it has a mural of an Irish countryside. The upstairs, which is called Beyond the Pale, is set up like a castle."

Snyder says the favorite part of her job is the service side. She describes herself as "a people person," one who thrives on developing customer relationships. She stated, "I would say that at least 60 percent of the people who walk through the door I know by name. And if I don't know them by name, I know where they like to sit, who they want to serve them, and what they want to drink. I like making people feel comfortable and wanting to come back as a result."

Some folks have gotten very comfortable with O'Lordans Irish Pub over the years. So much so that staff and customers swear a few 'spirits' still hang around to be amongst the living consuming fine spirits. "I believe!" Snyder exclaims. "The owners think I'm crazy, but I've seen them and experienced them. We know that one of the ghosts is the original owner of the Stonehouse Grill, Stanis Sharkey. We've seen him. Clients have seen him. He wears a fedora. He is very cute. We also know



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there is a woman. We can hear her whispering. And we know there are two kids. We're not sure if there's more. Their activity level goes up and goes down. We'll go months with nothing. Then, all of a sudden, it's one thing after another. Objects get pushed. Things get shoved. You'll feel a hand run down your back. Mr. Sharkey likes the girls a lot! Both of my daughters have actually had their hair pulled several times! You can ask almost every one of my staff, and they'll tell you they have had something happen."

In the land of the living, what's happening is O'Lordan's terrific beverage menu. It's an extremely big one. "When COVID hit," Snyder recalled, "we were primarily a beer place. I'd say at least 80 percent of my sales was draft beer. I took over the bar, and I really started working with craft cocktailing. We have developed an extensive drink menu. I probably have 10 different mules. Or you can make your own. We tell people all of the time, 'If you have a liquor you prefer and you want a mule, we're all in!' We'll put anything in a glass; we don't care."

She continued, "Mules and mojitos have become a big thing for us. I have a lot of different champagne drinks. Our Crush list is ginormous. It started with the original Orange Crush, and we have since expanded. One of my favorites is called The Wild Crush with orange juice and wild gin. You never think about putting gin into a Crush drink, but it is excellent!"

Snyder stressed that it is important she and her staff do not judge the customers on their drink preferences or special requests. She remarked, "I've worked with bartenders and servers who will look at people and say, 'You're going to drink that?' Let people have what they want. You don't have to drink

it. Why do you care? I'll work with people. They'll tell me things they want to mix, and I'm like, 'We can figure it out!' Our latest big thing is we've created a huge mocktail list. It's amazing what you can do with so little. We're also still a pretty strong beer location. I have 25 taps. We don't do domestics. It's a lot of craft beer and European stylings. We really try to give people something different. Most of my signature cocktails, you're not going to get them anywhere else."

At the mention of the COVID-19 era, though, Snyder's tone clearly turned serious. The pandemic and all of its restrictions – since lifted – still impact O'Lordan's to this day. "The biggest challenge I have is finding good, solid staff," Snyder said. "When COVID happened, it really brought out the best of everybody and the worst of everybody. Teachers, for example, tend to work in this industry a lot. It's easy money and flexible scheduling. I lost all of my teachers. I had five of them, and I lost them all. They suddenly had to work 18-hour days trying to figure out how to teach the kids. I lost other staff to full-time jobs that they could suddenly telecommute. A lot of people in our industry

realized they didn't have to do this anymore and got out. We're still struggling to find people who want to work in this business because it's hard. You're under a lot of pressure, and you constantly have to juggle multiple balls at one time and pray you don't drop any. I never had huge turnovers, and then it was like, 'Hey, where did everybody go?'"

Snyder quickly realized she had to take on more than a general manager normally would have. "What it comes down to is I have to know how to do everything so I can teach you how to do your thing," she explained. "I just washed dishes two weeks ago. The dishwasher got sick. I stepped in. I don't care. I just keep getting up, coming to work, and making the magic happen. The biggest piece of advice I could give anyone in management is you have to work with staff so that they see the expectation and the importance of doing it your way. My staff knows that I am in it with them."

Meanwhile, she indeed continues to enjoy the teaching aspect of her job. "I like working with staff to get them better and stronger. Hey, I enjoy them teaching me something new!"

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And, again, be willing to go the extra mile for the customers, the employees, the place itself. Snyder concluded with a smile, "There is nothing in this restaurant that I will ask an employee to do that I won't do myself . . . with the exception of plunging a toilet! I will plunge the toilet. I never want to see a server do that!" ■

And part of that teaching extends to making sure all staffers know O'Lordans past. Because inevitably, they are going to field questions from patrons interested in what came before. She believes this is true of anyone who manages a historic or noteworthy pub, bar, tavern, or restaurant.

"Learn your history," she urged. "Know the history of what you are selling, and always

be prepared to tell a story. When you are in a historical location like we are, people are always asking questions about the place. And you have to know it cold. You can't guess, and don't ever lie and make anything up because what you say can be easily checked. And train the staff on the history, because you don't want to be running to every table and telling the same stories over and over again."



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