

BARLEY AND HOPS GROWS IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS

By Teddy Durgin

After a successful career in the technology industry, Lori Keough was ready for a change. A big change. The beverage business! So, in early 2016, she purchased the Barley and Hops Microbrewery and Grill in Frederick, and it's been full speed ahead ever since.

"I worked all the way up to being a vice president of software engineering," she recalled, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*. "But I grew up in the restaurant and bar business, so I had a decision to make."

One of the first decisions she made after buying the business was to hire a new brewer, Eric Gleason, and give him the freedom to be as innovative as he wanted. Looking to create a buzz in the community, she also introduced live, local music at Barley and Hops twice a week and brought on an executive chef to craft a menu focusing on fresh ingredients and seasonal dishes.



LORI KEOUGH, OWNER, AND ERIC GLEASON, BREWER, OF BARLEY AND HOPS.

In terms of clientele, she stated, "We have a core set of regulars that we see three or four times a week, but we draw from all over. We get people who have never drank a craft beer come in, so we try and educate them. And then we get the beer geeks, who are all about craft brew and want as much of it as they can get. Lately, we're becoming more of a destination place with all of the breweries opening in Frederick County. So, we're getting a lot of tourists, too."

Part of the buzz is Barley and Hops' success in various beer competitions. Among the biggest wins so far was taking the Maryland Comptroller's Cup for Maryland's Top Beer of 2016. She and Gleason have also totally revamped the beer program. Today, Barley and Hops serves four house beers brewed onsite year round, along with a selection of a dozen or more specialty and seasonable brews at any given time.

It's no surprise then that staff training is mission-critical. Keough stated, "My brewer holds a beer class for the staff about once a month. We do an initial one when they first start here, too. We have also branched out into craft cocktails."

Technology has also played a key role in her early success. Barley and Hops has a large and expanding presence on social media. "It's all about getting your name out there," Keough said. "We Facebook daily. We use Twitter and Instagram. My husband does a lot of that actually."

Indeed, her husband Farrell Keough has become an increasingly valuable player at Barley and Hops. "I have given myself the title of Director of Waste Management," he cracked wise. "I try to catch it before it hits the fan!"

He then revealed, "I was also in the IT industry. I started in environmental science. As such, we both are maybe a little more savvy about databases and some of the more technical aspects of doing business than some bar or restaurant operators are. Also, with



my background in environmental science, we have been able to implement recycling programs and be a green business as much as possible."

Lori, though, knows that all of the cutting-edge technology and social responsibility would be meaningless without customers coming back again and again. To this end, she stresses the fundamentals to her staff. "One of the most important things is to ensure that your customers know you," she advised. "They have to know what you are about. They like to see you out and about in the restaurant and the bar."

And as much as it's about people, at the end of the day, it's also about the beer. Touting her in-house brewery, Lori Keough concluded, "We're wholesaling our beer as much as selling it over the bar. We have brought in a sales team, and that's helped. The last beer we made, called Frosted Flakes, just screamed out the door. In fact, we had to quit outside sales to ensure our regular customers had it here at the bar. A year from now, I would like to see our beer production doubled. I think we can do that, but we're kind of locked in right now. We can expand our barrelage. We just can't expand our tanks. So, the time will come where we will need to look for another location. But only when we're ready." ■

