



Despite Headwinds, Annapolis' **Boatyard Bar & Grill** Charts a Steady Course

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If you are going to do a series of articles on the top theme bars and restaurants in the state of Maryland, sooner or later that series must feature the Boatyard Bar & Grill in Annapolis. The Boatyard was founded in 2001 by Dick Franyo after he left his three-decade financial career with such firms as Alex. Brown & Sons and Deutsche Bank. As a little boy, Franyo grew up on the Chesapeake Bay. His vision for the Boatyard was to celebrate the Bay lifestyle and rank as the best sailor bar in Maryland.

Vision achieved, mission accomplished.

Located on Restaurant Row in the historic maritime district of Eastport, the Boatyard is just a brief stroll from the Annapolis City Docks. Photos of local sailors line its walls, and fish caught by local fishing pals are hung in the Boatyard's Pilar Bar (named after author Ernest Hemmingway's fishing boat).

"When we started," Franyo recalled, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, "we really wanted a place that speaks to sailing, fishing, the environment, and the Bay lifestyle. It started with the building we constructed, which looks like a Hinckley yacht with all the woods and treatments and beams. We then filled it full of incredible art and pictures. From ceiling to floor, there is artwork."

Indeed, there is an old wooden fishing skiff that was bought off a beach in Saint Barths. Another décor marvel is an original wooden sign from the Hogs Breath Bar in Key West. Everyone has their favorite pho-



to or décor item. Franyo's is the surfboard donated and signed by singer-songwriter Jack Johnson. General Manager Kevin Schendel's favorite is a photo of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara sitting on a boat, fishing for marlin, and smoking cigars. "Where else are you going to see that?" Schendel exclaimed during the same interview.

And the Boatyard Bar & Grill has de-

veloped a bit of a celebrity following. Then-First Lady Michelle Obama visited and was quoted as saying Boatyard's crab cakes were the best she'd ever had. "Having the First Lady come over from D.C. for crab cakes got us a lot of press," Franyo recalled. "She came here with something like 10 cars and 35 security people. And the word from friends of theirs is they still



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treat everyone with respect.
Your employees, your guests, your suppliers,
the people who take your garbage away.
Everyone."*

Dick Franyo
Founder
Boatyard Bar & Grill

order them! Jimmy Buffet comes when he is in town. I've sailed with him here in Annapolis. Kevin Bacon also comes here every time he is in town."

Boatyard's crab cakes have become local legend, even being named Best in the Region by *Baltimore Magazine*. They've proven so popular that Franyo and Co. ship them worldwide via Goldbelly.com. By Franyo's calculations, Boatyard sells approximately 90,000 crab cakes a year.

But it's the beverage menu that customers continue to return for. The wine selection is extensive and features a premium "Admiral's List." But the cocktails are where the real fun is at, with such nautical-named and local-themed delights as Boatyard's Bloody, the Eastport Mar-

garita, Maritime Tea, and Positively Fourth Street. According to Schendel, "We have the words 'Boat Drinks' printed right on our menu. So, we'll have drinks like a Dark and Stormy that are familiar to sailors. But we're also in Maryland, so we have half-crushes on the menu. The pint drinks offer good value, too. When people come off the water, they want a good, large drink."

Franyo concurred, adding, "Sailors and fishermen and people who love the water and the Bay lifestyle, they're really of an ilk that likes a REAL drink! Such big drinks really set you apart, and it ties into our theme and philosophy."

The Boatyard has been named by such publications as *Coastal Living*, *Sailing World*, and *Sail Magazine* as one of world's

top sailing/boating restaurants and bars. *Washingtonian Magazine* once called it "the nautical Cheers." Franyo and Schendel love and accept such accolades. But what they're most proud of is Boatyard's commitment to the environment.

For instance, the Boatyard is a member of One Percent For The Planet, a group of businesses that donate greater than 1 percent of their annual sales to the natural environment. In terms of accolades, the Boatyard received the Annapolis Environmental Stewardship Certification from Maryland's capital city. Even the restaurant's oyster shells are collected by the Oyster Recovery Program.

Franyo remarked, "So goes the Bay, so goes us. If the Bay isn't healthy, then peo-

"When the pandemic initially hit ... we made a really quick transition to make it easier for people to do business with us. But the key was being able to keep as many employees who wanted to stay on. Anybody who wanted to keep a job kept their job. We were able to keep our entire back-of-house team in place. So, when we could re-open, we were ready to go. That wasn't the case for many bars and restaurants."

Kevin Schendel
General Manager
Boatyard Bar & Grill





ple aren't going to come here."

In addition, the Boatyard founded and sponsors four outdoor lifestyle charity events each year: Bands in the Sand for and at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation; The Boatyard Beach Bash for and at the Annapolis Maritime Museum; the Boatyard Opening Day Rockfish Catch & Release Tournament, which benefits the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Coastal Conservation Association MD, and the Annapolis Police Department Youth Fishing Camp; and, finally, The Boatyard Regatta to benefit C.R.A.B. (Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating), which gets those with disabilities on sailboats.

The rest of Boatyard's success can be

chalked up to good, sound business principles that Franyo and his team have put in place over the years and stuck to. "It's people who are the key," Franyo stated. "Treat everyone with respect. Your employees, your guests, your suppliers, the people who take your garbage away. Everyone."

Schendel agreed, relating to how this philosophy benefited the business during the early months of the COVID-19 crisis, in particular. "When the pandemic initially hit," he said, "restaurants were ordered to shut down and offer carry-out service only. We made a really quick transition to make it easier for people to do business with us. We had carry-out windows. But the key was being able to keep as many employ-

ees who wanted to stay on. Anybody who wanted to keep a job kept their job. We were able to keep our entire back-of-house team in place. So, when we could re-open, we were ready to go. That wasn't the case for many bars and restaurants."

Franyo concluded, "In this business, there are 1,000 opportunities to make a mistake every day. It takes a lot of work and training to bring that one thousand down to zero. We agonize over everything. Every detail. Our philosophy is to kick ourselves in the butt and not pat ourselves on the back. If you work hard and you do things the right way, I believe you create your own luck." ■