

Rick Berman: Fighting the Good Fight

by Ted Durgin



own, gone in the direction of 08, main because the statistics do not bear out that... in meaningful. But states are coming in compliance with the federal mandate because there is too much money at risk they don't.

BJ: In your experience, do legislators respond more to facts and hard data or their own emotions and the emotional plea put to them by special interests?
RB: I believe it is a combination. I do think you can have one without the other. But it is clear that emotion will trump logic in many cases. Therefore, it becomes all the more important for businesspeople to be offense. By putting facts in front of people early, you can inoculate them from getting hooked into the emotional side of an argument before they've had an opportunity really understand it at an intellectual level.



He is admitted to practice in Virginia and Washington, D.C., and lives with his family in McLean, Va. *The Beverage Journal* recently caught up with Berman in his D.C. office to get his take on where the beverage industry currently stands on 08 and other

"Star Rainmaker" Leads Fight for Industry Causes

Richard "Rick" Berman doesn't mind making enemies. He either enjoys it actually. Berman is what is known in Washington circles as a "mover and shaker." In fact, for the past two years, he has been named the "Star Rainmaker" on Capitol Hill by *The Hill* Newspaper, testifying on numerous occasions before committees of the various state legislatures, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. If you have a pet like Rick on your side, you have a fighting chance in getting legislators to listen to your side of things. If you are his opponent, however, he's the guy you don't want to bump into in the hall.

Ackman Delivers Royal Service at Kings Contrivance

by Ted Durgin



If you have gone to The Kings Contrivance restaurant at any time in the past three decades to celebrate a birthday, an anniversary, or a graduation, then chances are you've seen Richard H. Ackman.

Ackman has worked in the popular dining establishment in Howard County since 1980. His first few years on the job he did everything from start tables to serve as second assistant manager. Since September of 1987, he has been a distinguished *Bevco* as head maître d'.



In Ackman, Kings Contrivance really is a home away from home. "The restaurant actually was a residence at one time," he noted, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*. "So you do feel like you are working at home instead of in a cold environment. The staff is very much like family, but I haven't hired a new employee in the server line in three years."

Indeed, the vast majority of Ackman's staff is over the age of 40. "They're seasonal veterans. It's very much like a football team actually. The kitchen staff is the defense. Out here in the dining room, we're the offense. And I would say the dishwasher, the food servers and the bus people are the special teams."

During his tenure as quarterback — on local matters if Ackman has seen The Kings Contrivance's beverage selection become one of its main selling points. He has played a key role in expanding the wine list from 50 to over 100 and adding more than 600 at one point and selecting a string of Wine Spectator award-winning

the wines by the glass. We did it on Friday for the first two years ago. The chef and I saw we had an enormous amount of inventory in the house, especially our top 10 highest-dollar bottles. Of course, the economy was running then in 2002. We decided to do the promotion on Friday night, because we'd really seen a lot of restaurants had failed Friday night. A lot of people still considered that they had a wine jacket and he here, which you don't. I'm the only one who has to wear a jacket and tie! We wanted to give people the feeling that they could come here, get a spectacular meal and a really good price on a bottle of wine they normally would not purchase."

He added, "The amazing thing that happened, even with half-priced wine, was the check average went up 54 a percent on Friday nights. The people who were buying the wine were also ordering very good steaks. They would normally spend \$55 on a bottle of wine. They saw that September 25th they could get a \$150 bottle of wine they normally would not be able to afford except on a special occasion."

More than anything, Ackman is fascinating to talk to just for all the changes he has seen in Columbia over the years. "When I first got here, there were virtually no police patrols," he recalled. "The late night carrying on was wild, and you would sometimes be concerned about people leaving here. Today, it's a much more controlled crowd. There has also been a shift in what people are drinking. In 1980, our

- ALIBI OF:** *Community Food Center*
- FAVORITE MOVIE:** *"The Godfather Part II"* *and "The Untouchables"*
- CAN'T MISS TV SHOW:** *"NYPD Blue"*
- SPORTS TEAM HE ROOTS FOR:** *American Soccer*
- FAVORITE HOLIDAY:** *Christmas*
- FAVORITE BEV DRINK:** *Red Wine*
- PERSON HE'D MOST LIKE TO MEET:** *Bill Clinton*

REOPENING: CLEARING THE AIR

ON-PREMISE ESTABLISHMENTS ARE NAVIGATING THE FOG OF REOPENING

by TEDDY DURGIN

Numerous restaurants, taverns, and bars are gradually reopening in the pandemic era. As customers concerned with their health and exposure to a virus...
 The nation's population, some are taking some pretty bold steps. In St. Louis County, Mo., chef-owner Robert Zook has introduced transparent...
 Darryl Sacks, co-owner of West Government, R.C., has installed an indoor HVAC system with an ultra-violet light and water...
 Chases to home in Maryland and Washington, D.C., for updated owners and operators are being very cautious. For example, several popular outdoor bars purchased ActivPure air purifiers from United Health & Wellness. Drew and Alan Theodoropoulos, co-owners of the Black Fox Tavern in Falmouth, Md., are among them.
 Said Drew, "We've purchased two air purification systems — one for the bar area and one for the dining area! We've also purchased technology in the most powerful ultraviolet light technology and we use space heaters. It's used to solve problems..."



Industry Again Unites After Ellicott City's Second Devastating Flood

By TEDDY DURGIN

TEDDY DURGIN

CHEERS TO 20 YEARS WRITING FOR THE BEVERAGE JOURNAL

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

Dear readers, I am taking a break from my monthly series of articles featuring historic bars, restaurants, and taverns in and around Maryland and Washington, D.C., to spotlight another age-old fixture of this region's beverage scene who is still standing . . . ME! For those unfamiliar with Yours Truly or who just never

noticed the name in nearly 300 bylines, I am Teddy Durgin. And August 2023 marks the 20th year I have covered beer, wine, and spirits for both the Maryland and Washington, DC Beverage Journals. And my editor from the get-go, Stephen Patten, was kind enough to allow me to commemorate this milestone with this tremendously self-serving, special column.

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Edward 'Teddy' Durgin
Staff Writer
The Beverage Journal

August 2003. In the world, a lot was different, and there was a lot going on. It was definitely the “post-9/11 era.” George W. Bush was President of the United States. Robert Ehrlich was Governor of Maryland. Anthony Williams was Mayor of the District of Columbia. The big news story that month was The Great Blackout, in which residents in eight states, New York City, and parts of Canada lost electrical power for days in the summer heat. The other major headline was Arnold Schwarzenegger announcing he would run for Governor of California in the recall election of Gray Davis. August 2003 was also the month the world lost baseball legend Bobby Bonds, father of Barry; tough-guy action movie star Charles Bronson; Herb Brooks, coach of the “Miracle on Ice” USA hockey team in 1980; and actor-dancer Gregory Hines.

Movies weren't any more original back then as they are today, as the top three theatrical releases for that month were “S.W.A.T.,” a big-screen update of the classic '70s TV show; “American Wedding,” the second sequel to 1999's “American Pie;” and “Freaky Friday,” a remake of the '70s family classic starring Lindsay Lohan and



Jamie Lee Curtis. As for TV, that summer saw the debuts of FX's “Nip/Tuck” and Fox's “The O.C.,” but most people were vegging out to such reality fare as “Last Comic Standing” and “Who Wants to Marry My Dad?”

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It was in that time that I walked into the then-offices of the Beverage Journal in Hanover, Maryland, and met Steve Patten and publisher extraordinaire, Lee Murray, for the first time. My former college journalism mentor, Tom Nugent, had been their main columnist for several years, but he had just moved to the wilds of small-town Michigan to raise his three daughters closer to his wife's family. Lee and Steve knew beverages. They didn't so much know journalists – i.e., who could write, make deadlines, knock on doors, be a pest, and ask the questions the Beverage Journal's readers wanted and needed answered.

Tom recommended me to replace him and set up that initial meeting. I was engaged to my lovely wife, **Bonnie**, at the time. We were set to get married in Las Vegas that December. I was a new homeowner. And suddenly, I realized . . . I would be needing more cash than I ever had before in my life!

Yeah, I wish I could say initially it was my love for our industry that drew me to these two fine publications. But it was the extra income. I didn't grow up in the beverage business as so many of the people I've interviewed over the years have. I knew wines came in red and white, but knew very little about the different varietals and almost nothing about the different companies. Beers? I was a Miller Genuine Draft guy and pretty much nothing else. And I had enjoyed a few shots of whiskey from time to time on various Fells Point pub crawls or whenever I needed to summon the courage to call a girl, give someone some bad news, or . . . well . . . apply for a job as a monthly columnist.

Fortunately, I was armed with glowing references from editors' past and a portfolio of articles covering a wide array of stories and topics for such publications as the Baltimore Sun, the Hartford Courant, and Chesapeake Bay Magazine. I also had a day journalism job writing and editing specialized news services for a Bethesda-based company that would eventually be acquired by SmithBucklin, the world's largest trade association management company. So, I wouldn't be requiring health insurance or a 401k. I also wrote a weekly film review column for the Avenue News in Baltimore.

Lee and Steve saw that I was adaptable and a quick learner. After all, I had covered everything from entertainment to the local boat-

ing scene to such industries as commercial real estate and food-service. Back then, I touted myself as a "Jack of All Trades, Master of None." And it was this adaptability coupled with the fact that I'd always worked fast and cheap that convinced Lee and Steve to hire me. I think we clicked right away with our shared love of the Baltimore Orioles; our appetite for Gunnings crabcakes (a restaurant that was right down the road from those original offices); and a shared sense of humor in which the more politically incorrect the joke, the harder we laughed.

I so miss THOSE days!

Flash-forward two decades. My wife and I are on the verge of

celebrating our 20th wedding anniversary by returning to Vegas and getting remarried by Elvis. We have an 18-year-old daughter, and we have since relocated to the Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, market to care for family. But with all of the technology that has emerged in these past 20 years – Zoom meetings, smartphone apps, social media, etc. – I am still able to write my monthly column from remote. And I still make it back to the Maryland-D.C. area at least a couple times per year to reconnect with friends, eat at Roy Rogers, and provide the Beverage Journal with in-person coverage.

OK, so far, I haven't written much about my experiences in the beverage biz these past 240 months, I know. First of all, there would be WAY too many people to thank, FAR too many memories

to highlight, and so SO many stories to tell. Hey, I've become an industry veteran! I can start sentences with, "When I started in this industry, there wasn't. . ." or "When I first began writing about beer and wine, we didn't have. . ."

Some stories, of course, stand out more than others. I was privileged to cover the aftermath of both tragic floods in Ellicott City from the local bar and restaurant owners' perspectives. Never have I ever felt such responsibility as a journalist and storyteller as when I was interviewing those proprietors and their staffers and how those two tragedies had changed their lives so thoroughly. Covering those two tragedies, I realized how much this industry takes care of its own! The outpouring of support was overwhelming from other bar, restaurant, and tavern owners; packaged goods store operators; and beverage distributors and suppliers. As a journalist, I try



and keep my personal emotions out of the stories I tell as much as possible. It was darn-near impossible with those columns.

There's also become a rhythm to this work over the years. Each year as Christmas approaches, for instance, I know I will be writing the Maryland legislative update articles and talking with two of the finest gents you could ever meet – Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA) lobbyist J. Steven "Steve" Wise and MSLBA Legislative co-Chairman Jack Milani. I also love those years when I've been allowed to craft a series of articles on one big topic. Last year, I highlighted 12 different theme bars and restaurants around Maryland and D.C. This year, it's the series on historic bars and eateries.

And then there was the pandemic. Wow, the COVID-19 crisis threw our industry into a crisis! Never before had I felt the importance of the articles we publish month in and month out in the Beverage Journals. I reported on stories of survival, innovation, resolve, and even patriotism. Again, owners, operators, bartenders, salespeople, waitstaff, and others were eager to go on record and offer encouragement and advice for those readers also struggling and having to adapt to COVID-era policies and restrictions. Sadly, not everyone survived. But it was an amazing time being a commentator and reporter. There are times in this line of work that one feels like a "real journalist," and that was certainly one of them. I had to rely on every bit of training, education, experience, and contacts I had to keep my monthly column afloat and resonating with subscribers.



I am proud of the work I did then. And I am very proud of the work I have done from August 2003 to today and will continue doing! I am the Iron Man, the Cal Ripken Jr., of the Maryland and Washington, DC Beverage Journals! In an era where writers and editors flip flop around publications year after year, I have enjoyed a stability many never know and a loyalty from employer that most truly never, EVER know. So, thank you, Steve. Thank you, Lee. And thank you, beverage industry professionals! I raise a glass and toast you all! ■



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