



# MELANIE'S AT GRIFFITH'S TAVERN

TWO WORKING GIRLS MAKE A GO OF IT

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**D**uring this ongoing series of articles on bars, restaurants, and taverns in and around Maryland named after a person, we have chronicled establishments named after the current owner, after the current owner's grandfather, and one restaurant bearing the family name.

And then we have Melanie's at Griffith's Tavern in Baltimore's Hampden community. Yeah, you're reading that right. It's named after the Oscar-nominated actress of "Working Girl" and "Something Wild" fame.

**Allison Crowley  
and Hannah Spangler  
owners & operators of  
Melanie's at Griffith's Tavern**

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Oh, it didn't always used to be that. This fiercely proud neighborhood bar was previously just Griffith's Tavern. Hannah Spangler and Allison Crowley bought that business in March 2022 from its previous owner, Rick Koehler, who had run it for 45 years. Spangler co-owned the Cans Filling Station beer bar at Cross Street Market where Crowley also worked. But that place closed at the end of January 2022. The opportunity soon arose for the two business partners to purchase the tavern and its adjoining house.

They wanted to keep Griffith's name and the history that comes with it, but add their own personal touch. Thus, Melanie's at



Griffith's Tavern was born, with the name being a nod to actress Melanie Griffith who starred in Baltimore filmmaker John Waters' movie "Cecil B. Demented" and who's father hails from Charm City.

"We definitely didn't want to eliminate

Griffith's from the name. It goes back so many years. Melanie Griffith's made sense. But then Allison said, 'Uh, how about Melanie's at Griffith's so she doesn't sue us!' And that's where we landed. As it turns out, when she found out about us, she was real-



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ly excited. She's very sweet. She follows us on social media."

And as it turns out, the new co-owners and Griffith had a mutual friend . . . John Waters himself. "I've known John Waters for a long time," Spangler said. "My dad knew him. He finally came in after we had been open for a little while and was very apologetic.

'I'm so sorry it took me this long to get here!' And I said, 'Don't worry about it. You're here now.' And he said, 'I was just in L.A. and I ran into Melanie, and we were talking about your bar! Hey, do you want to FaceTime her?'" And that was, of course, mind-blowing. I was like, 'No, I don't want to FaceTime Melanie Griffith! [laughing] I've just been sweating for four hours, but, uh, thank you very much!"

Beyond the Hollywood angle, Melanie's at Griffith's Tavern appeals to customers from both a historical and social perspective. The location dates back to the Prohibition era and was originally a men's-only stag bar. Meanwhile, Spangler and Crowley are members of the LGBTQ community and have reached out accordingly.

Says Spangler, "It's just a great gathering place. All bars are, I guess. But I think the neighborhood is what makes it particularly special. We have some old-timey folks . . . people who came regularly before we bought it. We also have an undercurrent, a reputation, for being a gay bar. But we welcome everybody. If anything, we're a dive bar!"

As for beverages, Melanie's at Griffith Tavern does a reasonably good job of rotating in local beers, wines, and spirits with the usual national brands. On one night, Trailblazer bourbon whiskey from Lost Ark Distilling in Columbia, Md., was pouring aplenty. Spangler remarked, "We all come from a service industry background. So, our whole beverage philosophy – if we have one – is try and give the customers what they want. We don't really have a menu. Our drinks are all written on mirrors."

Still, Spangler acknowledged the job's ups and downs, highs and lows, positives and negatives. "The favorite part of my job is the stories," she said, "the stories that I hear from our customers. I'm sure every bartender says that. But the stories are why I am not an accountant. On the other hand, the most challenging part of what I do are new employees who have never worked in our industry and come into a bar like mine not knowing how to 'do it,' how to treat people."

For those reading this and dreaming of one day opening their



own establishment – whether it be a neighborhood dive bar or part of a national chain – Spangler was quick to advise: "Set up a plan. Have a closing check-list. Have all of your ducks in a row. Even if you keep such things on a legal pad, just keep everything orderly. Most importantly, do every single job in a restaurant or a bar before you

open one! I have been really fortunate to have had good leaders, and all of them have said, 'If you want to be the manager, if you want to be the boss, you gotta bus, you gotta wait, you gotta bartend, you gotta do it all . . . and then you'll be ready.'" ■

