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Meet the Merchant

Interview by Luke Whittaker | lwhittaker@crbizjournal.com

How long have you worked here?

“About five years.”

How did you get started?

“My parents own it.”

How long have they had the business?

“I want to say about 12 years.”

Was it always in this location?

“No, it used to be over by Hondo’s Brew & Cork. About seven years ago it moved to this location. I’ve heard this building was lots of different things, maybe even a car showroom at one point.”

Can you tell me a little about the inventory you carry?

“We have one of the most varied selection of products on this side of the coast. We have all your basic cordials — gin, whiskey, rum, vodka, tequila.”

What sells the most?

“Lately vodka has been selling pretty well. A lot of people have been buying Everclear to make hand sanitizer. I would say vodka and whiskey are our biggest sellers. It also depends on the time of the year. Summer is more gin and tequila. In winter we sell more rum.”

What are some of the latest products on your shelf?

“Seasonally we get the Schmirnoff Red, White and Berry vodka. It’s pretty popular, people really like it during the summer. We’ve brought in a bunch of different ryes and people have been experimenting with those.”

What are some of the rare, unique or hard-to-find products you carry?

“We get Blanton’s and Weller bourbon whiskey pretty regularly and a lot of places can’t. We get them once or twice a month.”

What’s the most expensive bottle on the shelf?

“Probably the Johnnie Walker Blue Label. The Macallan 18 (\$350) is pretty expensive too.”

Is there one bottle you consider a best buy?

“Tito’s (vodka) flies off the shelf.”

Have you ever had any unusual requests from customers?

“Yes, a lot of times people request things that no one can get. We do our best and do special orders each week for customers if they ask.”

Have you ever encountered anyone trying to buy alcohol with a fake ID?

“We haven’t seen it in a long time but it’s happened before. We know what to look for with a fake ID — if its cut or looks different — and we run them through our scanner. We haven’t had it happen in a long time.”

Did it used to be more common?

“We’re a small town and we know most people. So when someone comes in that looks young... We probably know your mom.”



Natalie Nielsen is the manager of Astoria Liquor Store, a family-run business that carries hundreds of different varieties of alcohol.

Astoria Liquor Store**Natalie Nielsen, manager****Phone:** 503-325-4784**Address:** 730 Bond St., Suite A, Astoria**What’s the protocol with someone that gets busted with a fake ID?**

“We just take it and ask them to leave. Usually what happens is we ask someone for their ID and they throw a fit and say they’re going to go get it and never come back.”

What impact has the covid-19 outbreak had on business?

“There are a lot of bars in Astoria and most of them are our clients. We don’t have that clientele right now because they’re not open. We just now opened back up to our regular hours. The last few weeks we had shortened hours and were closed on Sunday because we just didn’t have the personnel to stay open. Things are starting to go back to normal for us.”

What percent of your business comes from sales to restaurants?

“About 10%.”

What’s your favorite part of the job?

“The people I work with and the people we get to interact with.”

Are there any customers stories that resonate with you?

“Every day. There’s a lot of characters that come in from all walks of life.”

Is there one liquor you feel is underappreciated or often overlooked?

“I think sometimes with the whiskeys or the vodkas people think they have to be top end to get the best. But there’s a lot of mid-range that are high quality.”

Do you have a personal favorite?

“Hussong’s Tequila.”

Are there any cocktails that were once popular that are making a come back?

“The old ones are coming back — the Sidecar, the Manhattan. Things like that, they’re all coming back. The new thing now is the peanut butter whiskey. They need to mix it with Chambord (raspberry liqueur) so they can have a peanut butter and jelly shot. Another is chocolate whiskey, you can make a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup.”