

BEST BAR

REACH BREAK BREWING

ASTORIA

Runner-up: Astoria Coffee House & Bistro**Honorable mention:**

Carruthers, Astoria

By JACK HEFFERNAN

When told that their watering hole was chosen as the best in the area, Josh and Jared Allison raised their eyebrows.

"I'm actually kind of surprised we won it," Josh said, laughing. "There are so many other spots in town."

The brothers co-own Reach Break Brewing along with Finn Parker. Just over a year old, the small brewery has quickly drawn crowds of people — some beer enthusiasts, some not — to the corner of Exchange and 13th streets.

Outside the front door is a seating area featuring two food carts — Hot Box BBQ and Mai Thai Tong. Next door, Reveille Ciderworks offers a sweeter beverage selection.

The Allison quickly learned that when the sun appears, more customers follow suit.

"In the summertime, the outside patio will just be completely filled," Josh said. "People with their kids, people with their dogs. That's been great."

The brothers said they were surprised at how many regular locals the bar attracts rather than those coming from Portland, Seattle or cruise ships.

"We survive on locals now," Josh said. "We're much smaller than other places, so, like, people see us maybe a little bit more. We get to know people."



DANNY MILLER PHOTO

Assorted beers at Reach Break Brewing

Reach Break alters its selection of beers and avoids keeping one beer on the menu for more than a small window of time. The rotation contrasts the flagship beer options at other local breweries such as Fort George Brewery (known for brews like Vortex IPA and Cavatica Stout).

"People ask as, 'When are you going to bring this one back?'" Josh said. "We say, 'Probably never.'"

The brothers credit two servers, Trista Heeding and Chris Smirl, for the brewery's ability to connect with locals. When the weather warms, those locals can also include young children playing outside and dogs lying by their owners' side.

"I guess, maybe, that is a thing," Jared said. "We're really accommodating to families with the outside area. People can come down. Their kids can play with other kids. Parents can eat some food, grab a beer, hang out." **CW**

BEST BARTENDER

JEANY BIRDENO

MERRY TIME BAR AND GRILL, ASTORIA

Runner-up:

Logan Garner, Fort George Brewery, Astoria

Honorable mention:

Cory Teubner, Astoria Coffee House & Bistro

By JACK HEFFERNAN

Jeany Birdeno is perhaps the only babysitter in town who is paid to provide alcohol to "children."

Especially on Friday and Saturday nights, the Merry Time Bar and Grill bartender likens her customers to kids whom she fondly babysits for the evening.

"They're only 20 years younger than me, but they're still my kids," said Birdeno, 41. "I get paid to play. I have fun."

Birdeno also waits tables and has helped with managerial duties since the restaurant's owners, Terry and Todd Robinett, recently purchased Labor Temple Diner & Bar.

Birdeno has worked at



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Jeany Birdeno pours a drink at the Merry Time Bar and Grill in Astoria.

Merry Time about three years. An Astoria native, her past stops include The Chart Room, Labor Temple and a handful of restaurant franchises.

She distinguishes between servers who simply take orders and those who offer customer service. Her experience has taught her a few tricks: smiling, looking people in the eye and conveying respect.

"It's making sure their needs are met even before they even know it," Birdeno said.

Serving at a sports bar can be challenging when highly publicized games are on television.

"To you, it's just like, 'Eh, nothing special,'" Birdeno said. "Then everybody just shows up at once,

and all of the sudden you have 50 people in here and it's just you."

But customers, for the most part, respond well to her.

"If they see you moving, they understand. You're working as hard as you can. We're cool with that," Birdeno said. "If I was over in a corner just chit-chatting with someone or on my phone, they would get a little more upset, which I don't blame them."

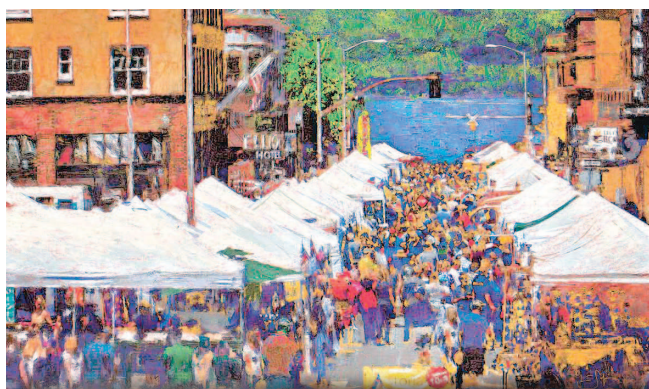
Birdeno used to work during night hours exclusively, but she recently has taken various shifts.

No matter what time of day it is, the job can be as fun as you make it, Birdeno said. "My attitude is, 'If I'm having fun, so is everybody else, usually.'" **CW**

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