

CONTACT US
Alyssa Evans
aevans@dailyastorian.com

WEEKEND BREAK

THE ASTORIAN • SATURDAY, AUGUST 22, 2020 • B1



FOLLOW US
facebook.com/
DailyAstorian



BARTENDER OR BABYSITTER?

Bars adapt to coronavirus restrictions

By MORGAN GRINDY
The Astorian

The music is loud. Lights are low. Bartenders rattle ice and pour drinks behind the bar. You know the typical scene of a bar on the weekend: it's busy and it's crowded — but that's part of the appeal.

Many local bars were forced to shut down completely earlier this year because of state and local coronavirus restrictions.

Reopening has been complicated for bar owners and bartenders. Their jobs include more sanitizing and supervision of customers.

"It's less of a free-for-all and more directed traffic," said Cory Teubner, co-owner of Blaylock's Whiskey Bar. "Playing COVID-police at the door is a lot bigger part of the job these days."

Blaylock's day-to-day operations haven't changed much because of the coronavirus, but making drinks and customer interaction has become more difficult, Teubner said.

"One of the biggest things is trying to communicate with people when all they can see is your eyes and you might be talking to them but it's too loud to hear what they're saying," Teubner said.

Another owner of Blaylock's, Ben Thompson, said they've tried to evolve into something that fits the guidelines but doesn't diminish the customer experience of being in a whiskey bar.

"Couples would talk with themselves more than try to tell everything to the bartender, or singles try to meet each other. You don't see that very often," Thompson said.

The two both miss being able to see their customers' faces and have conversations with them.

"Facial expressions are easier to read when it's more than just an eyeball," Thompson said.

Tieler Ferrell, a bartender at The Chart Room, said she's had a hard time keeping customers from getting too close to each other.

"It's really hard to keep people who have been drinking 6 feet apart from each other," Ferrell said. "It's just as easy for me to keep them separated than it is to keep my kid from touching everything in the grocery store."

Ferrell was the last to return to work when the Chart Room reopened. Having a young child at home makes her more anxious at work.

"Anxiety attacks are almost normal now, at least for me," she said. "You start to feel like you actually can't breathe, because people don't want to follow the rules."

The Chart Room has a sign at the front door asking guests to not be offended if they're turned away because the bar is full.

The booths are separated with plastic guards. Guests can no longer order drinks or sit at the bar. Only half of the poker machines are open.

"I feel like restaurants were always places where people go and are polite and respectful," Ferrell said. "A lot of people, when they're consuming alcohol, don't care. Their courtesy goes away with every drink."

Guests have been more generous with their space and respectful with each other over time, Ferrell said.

Although she feels like she's working at "daycare for grownups," she said she misses how the bar used to operate.

"It's a totally different thing after 10 o'clock at night when you can turn the jukebox up and just have a good time. And I miss being able to wear lipstick," Ferrell said. "People miss being at the bar and being in each other's space. You lose a lot of human connection with this, which is why people are coming out."

Astoria's bars and breweries have attracted locals who missed going out on the weekend and an influx of tourists. Reach Break Brewing has adapted by only doing table service and outdoor seating.

"It's definitely a little bit more complicated. There's a lot more steps and a lot more sanitizing to do," Michael Shultz, a bartender at Reach Break, said. "In a restaurant, people stick to their table more. In bars, they feel more driven to just wander around, which is difficult to control."

Astoria Brewing Co., another popular spot for tourists,



Photos by Morgan Grindy/The Astorian

TOP: Owners Cory Teubner and Ben Thompson at Blaylock's Whiskey Bar in Astoria. ABOVE: A server at Astoria Brewing Co. pours beer.

is busy from open to close.

Because of the heavy traffic, they've installed a chain at the entrance, plexiglass at the registers and have specific seating arrangements.

"We've made the adaptation to this system and it works," Astoria Brewing Co. chef Matt McClure said.

McClure said they've been inspected 10 times in recent months and constantly have eyes on them to be adhering to coronavirus precautions and guidelines for restaurants and bars because they rely so heavily on tourism for business.

McClure has found the biggest struggle to be that because every bar and restaurant has adapted to the guidelines differently, customers have to understand a new system at each place they go to in Astoria.

McClure, along with others who work at bars in Astoria, hope the regulations will eventually settle and people will become more used to them.

The lack of uniformity is a source of frustration for customers, especially ones from other states. McClure said he's seen IDs from every state in the past few months.

"We send more people away than we seat every day," McClure said.