



THE COVID-19 CRISIS HASN'T DENTED CHIEF'S BAR'S STANDING IN ITS COMMUNITY

BY TEDDY DURGIN

Chief's Bar is the kind of place people REALLY miss going to when there is a snowstorm, a tropical storm, when they're traveling ... or when there's a global outbreak of a deadly coronavirus. The business has been a community hub in Tall Timbers, Md., since 1927. David Dent is the second generation of his family to own the business since 1978. He has come to appreciate both Chief's history and the place it has in people's hearts.

"Chief's is truly 'Your Neighborhood Bar,'" he declared, during a late May interview with the *Beverage Journal*. "I am always amazed at the number of guests who celebrate their birthdays with us. We have hosted birthday parties for guests as young as one year old to guests well into their 90s.

It helps that Chief's is more than a bar. It's more than a restaurant. It's also a deli, a store, and a caterer. Having so many different areas of operation can be challenging. "I find several key factors that make a business successful," Dent said. "You must have great systems and consistent training to set your staff up for success. Chief's most important asset is our employees. Invest in your employees, and your guests will be well served."

But even the best employees have never experienced anything like the shut-down orders, business restrictions, and social distancing guidelines that were

imposed when COVID-19 started take hold of the country and Maryland. This is where steady leadership is so important. "Since the start of the closure," Dent stated, "our sales are down. But we are at least open and still able to serve our community. Although most of our full-time staffers continue to earn a paycheck, it has been necessary to adjust our food service procedures and reposition some of the staff members. But all things considered, we've been very fortunate during the pandemic."

The challenges haven't diminished his love for the work. Dent says it is has been especially rewarding to help preserve certain long-standing St. Mary's County food and beverage traditions. "Our county is the home of the 10-ounce Budweiser and Stuffed Ham," he noted. "Ten-ounce Bud and Bud Light beers are staples of county

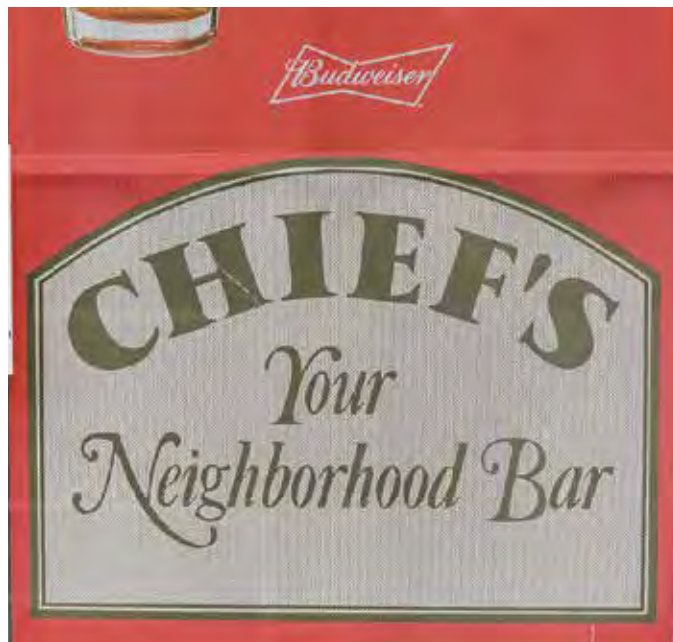


life. Nothing is better than eating a Stuffed Ham sandwich while drinking a 10-oz."

Still, being the boss does have its personal challenges. "I find communication can be very challenging," Dent shared. "To be a good communicator, you must also be a good listener. You must take the time to listen to others to be a problem solver."

He credits his dad, a retired Senior Chief from the U.S. Navy, for instilling in him the qualities of a good decision-maker. "He led by example and instilled in me a strong work ethic," Dent remarked. "He taught me to set goals, then to enjoy the rewards of working hard. It's amazing how lucky you can get when you work hard to accomplish goals."

Dent also learned much as a past president of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA). He enjoyed his time while at the reins and was also an active participant of the American Beverage Licensees (ABL). "I have been associated with the MSLBA for many years," he noted, "and I have found the association to be an integral part of our success here at Chief's. In Maryland, the alcohol beverage business is regulated at the local level to ensure responsible retailers are looking out for the best interests of their community. Chief's is the definition of a local 'Mom and Pop' store. As part of the MSLBA, not only do I have access to important information concerning legislation that directly affects my bottom line, but I have a voice that allows me to help not only my business but other small businesses. I would urge all alcohol retail licensees to join MSLBA. During this COVID-19 crisis, the association has been an invaluable resource to help licensees navigate the executive orders, guidance, and support available for small businesses."



Looking ahead, Dent is eager for a time when Chief's and Maryland, in general, have moved past the virus. He is cautiously optimistic that the second half of 2020 will go well. As of May 29 when this interview was conducted, restaurants and bars were permitted to begin reopening with outside table service.

At that time, he commented, "We are focusing on a plan to safely reopen for outside service and hope that will soon lead to the lifting of closure orders and allow us to reopen for regular business. There is so much pent-up demand, so I am sure we will have the opportunity to be successful ... as long as everyone practices common-sense measures." ■



Is Your Establishment a Member of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA)?

Message from David Dent of Chief's Bar:

"I have been associated with the MSLBA for many years, and I have found the association to be an integral part of our success here at Chief's. I would urge all alcohol retail licensees to join MSLBA."

MSLBA is the multicultural, go-to organization for Maryland retail alcohol beverage industry issues. No matter how proficient you are at the operations and management of your business, many factors influencing your success are outside your direct control. Your best chance for competently and successfully dealing with external forces such as legislation, regulation, suppliers, enforcement agencies and prohibition efforts, is by joining with other retailers for reputable representation through MSLBA.

Contact MSLBA for Membership Information:

Phone: (410) 871-1377 • **FAX:** (410) 871-2545 • **E-Mail:** MSLBAmembers@msn.com

Please provide the following:

Name of County or City Alcohol Licensing Board for Your Establishment: _____

Your Name: _____ Phone: () _____

Business Name: _____

Business Physical Address: _____