



THE TUNE INN

LONG-TIME REGULAR CUSTOMERS ARE CREDITED WITH
CARRYING THE TUNE

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

The Capitol Hill building that houses the Tune Inn has been many different things over the last century. It was once a candy kitchen. In the 1920s, it was a speak easy. Not long after, it was a men's tailor shop that catered to the gentlemen of the U.S. Congress. In 1947, though, Joe Nardelli

purchased the site, turned it into a tavern, and gave it the name that has stuck to this day. Today, it holds the distinction of being the second oldest liquor license in the nation's capital since the repeal of Prohibition. Currently, Joe's granddaughter, Lisa Nardelli, is the Tune Inn's owner and operator.

Stephanie Hulbert
General Manager
The Tune Inn



Being a family-owned and operated business for more than 70 years is quite a feat and more than qualifies it for our ongoing series of historic bars and taverns in Maryland and Washington, D.C. What's the secret to this popular and unpretentious bar's success and longevity? General Manager Stephanie Hulbert was eager to respond. "People like consistency," she said. "They like knowing that they'll see

the same faces. Many get served their favorite drink without having to even ask for it. The community and our regulars definitely make up the bar's [core clientele]. Most of them have been coming for 20 to

30 years. Their support has been everything. It's a cliché. But a lot of people who walk in for the first time or are from out of town immediately go to the 'Cheers' reference . . . 'Where everybody knows your

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James Williams
Bartender
The Tune Inn

name.' That's exactly what makes it a great atmosphere."

She continued, "Our regulars have supported us through everything. We saw that most during COVID. A lot of small bars and restaurants like ours were closing down. I'm not going to say that we thrived. But the community really kept coming in almost every day."

That beloved level of consistency has also been set by The Tune's – as regulars affectionately call it – group of long-time employees. Hulbert noted that one bartender, Matt, has been at The Tune for 26 years. Another bartender, James, has been on staff for the past 18 years. "And both of our long-standing cooks have been here

for over 20 years. It's definitely family-oriented as far as the employees go."

The Tune features an impressive menu of food items for its size. It is complemented well by a beverage menu that doesn't try hard at all to impress. "Our beverage philosophy is to 'keep it simple,'" Hulbert said. "We're quirky in the way that we respond to drink requests. When people come in and ask for a wine list, we say, 'Red or white? Chardonnay or cabernet?' We don't have a formal cocktail list. We just tell people, 'If we have the ingredients, we'll make it for you!' We've made quite a lot of Old Fashioneds and Moscow Mules and Manhattans lately. I think we now have four martini glasses behind the bar."

She added, "We're more of a beer bar. We do try to keep it local. So, we do have D.C. Brau on tap. We have three of those, in fact. We also have the classic Natty Bo, which has always been a staple at The Tune. We have multiple signs from years and years ago within the bar."

Hulbert briefly left The Tune in December 2021 to run her own pop-up restaurant. But she's been back since March. "When I was gone for a while," she remarked, "I really learned how much The Tune has taught me. This place is an anomaly in some many great ways. It has taught me patience. It has taught me how to deal with different characters – not only the folks who come in but also the people you work





with. For me, I've invested a lot of my life and a lot of my career in The Tune. I've essentially grown up here, and that's crazy to say out loud! I never would have thought that years ago. It's molded me into a more patient person, a more 'people person.' I know now to never judge a book by its cover. There are a lot of people who walk into The Tune, and you don't know their story. Often, it's pretty amazing. And of course, there are the managerial aspects of it. Hey, in 12 years, I've learned how to run a restaurant and bar!"

In addition to the regulars, Hulbert while she was away missed the eclectic mix of famous folk who come in to The Tune from

time to time. Years ago, Kevin Spacey was a one-time customer. "He was very intoxicated!" she recalled with a hearty laugh. "I remember it was crowded, and he had his head down on the table. It was pretty funny. Jack Black has come in. Anne Burrell from The Food Network also came in, and I ended up having a nice, long conversation with her. But, of course, everyone always asks me, 'What politicians have been in?' Yes, I've seen a lot of them, and I've seen some things I probably shouldn't have been privy to. I've just kept my mouth shut on all of them. I've yelled at interns who have gone up to congressmen and women at the bar [to talk politics]. I tell them, 'They're

not here for that right now. They come to The Tune to have a drink and enjoy themselves."

Looking ahead, Hulbert hopes to bolster the events side of The Tune's business. She concludes, "We are open to a lot of private events. We're doing a crabfest at the end of July. And we will be doing some music events and some more informal pop-up dinners in August and September. I am trying to schedule these events for specific days where I think we may need to increase business. I actually don't think a lot of people know they can rent out The Tune. But you can. We're here for our locals and for everyone!" ■

