



FINDING NEW DELIGHTS AT THE

OLD ANGLER'S INN

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When researching historic bars, taverns, and restaurants in and around Maryland and Washington, D.C., for this special series of articles, one of the first things this journalist looked for were those businesses that had the word “Old” in its name. You have to earn the word “Old” if you want to be taken seriously as a legacy establishment. Old Angler’s Inn in Potomac certainly qualifies.

Proprietor Mark Reges remarks, “Old Angler's Inn is truly something special and cool for a multitude of reasons. First and foremost, our history dates back to 1860, setting us apart as a unique and enduring establishment. Such a rich heritage is not something you come across every day, and it infuses our restaurant with a sense of timeless charm. Even more remarkable is the incredible array of historic figures and beloved celebrities who have frequented Old Angler's Inn throughout the years. From former presidents to Hollywood icons, our doors have welcomed them all.”

You can feel it when you pull up to the place. You can certainly feel it when you walk in. Old Angler's Inn is a treasure trove of stories, memories, and fine dining experiences that have stood the test of time.

Mark Reges
Proprietor
Old Angler's Inn

"When you dine with us, you're not just enjoying a meal," Reges said during a recent interview with the Beverage Journal. "You're stepping into a piece of living history that offers a truly unique and cool dining experience."

Two historical factoids about Old Angler's Inn leap to Reges' mind as being particularly fascinating. First, the Inn is steeped in the tradition of the "Golden Hook Society," a society that was home to presidents and prominent political leaders of the late 19th century. "This society would gather at the Inn to discuss matters of great importance, making it a hub of political discourse and camaraderie during that era," he noted. "Secondly, one of the most infamous and intriguing moments in the Inn's history involves my mother, Olympia Reges. Early in her ownership, she made quite a statement by ejecting Supreme Court Justice William Douglas and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall from the premises. Their crime? Dripping rainwater from their fishing gear onto the new carpet she had just installed!"

The incident not only added an amusing twist to the Inn's history, but also marked a turning point in its popularity. Justice Douglas, known for his environmental activism, had a yearly tradition of hiking the C&O Canal across the street from the Inn, promoting the Canal's beauty and the importance of its preservation. "On one fateful rainy day," Reges said, "Douglas and his entourage, including senators and national reporters, stopped by the Inn, and the reporters witnessed their unexpected expulsion. The incident made headlines in every major newspaper the next day, catapulting Old Angler's Inn to fame and cementing its reputation as 'the place to see and be seen.'"

And some figures have loved the Old Angler's Inn so much, they've . . . uh, lingered longer than most. Yes, dear readers, with such a long history inevitably comes numerous reports of ghost sightings and rumored supernatural activity. Some of these stories include accounts of blue floating balls witnessed by those closing the business late at



night. Reges added, "Staff members have shared peculiar experiences, such as turning off lights as they left only to return and find the lights mysteriously back on. There have also been instances where individuals entered the establishment after hours during sweltering summer nights, yet they immediately felt an eerie and bone-chilling cold. These stories add an intriguing layer to the mystique of Old Angler's Inn and continue to be a topic of conversation among our guests and staff."

With this being the Beverage Journal, the discussion inevitably turned to the Old Angler's Inn's beverage menu. Reges was proud to tout. "Our beverage menu is a carefully curated blend of timeless classics and heartfelt signature cocktails," he said. "One of our house favorites is the 'Sara Says,' a blend of cava, Tito's Vodka, and a hint of fresh grapefruit named after my wife, Sara."

In addition, the Inn offers "The Rosa Martin" named after a close friend and neighbor of the Reges family. "The Rosa Martin' is a nod to Rosa's love for the Gimlet, and it stands as a testament to the warmth and friendship we share with her," Reges explained.

Also offered is a rotating selection of seasonal cocktails. Reges stated, "Our beverage service philosophy can be summed up in a simple yet powerful mantra: 'Tradition, Tribute, and Taste.' We take pride in the tradition of serving classic cocktails that have stood the test of time, paying homage to the iconic era from which we hail. We infuse our offerings with a sense of tribute, celebrating the people and relationships that have made Old Angler's Inn the cherished establishment it is today. The "Sara Says" and "The Rosa Martin" are prime examples





of this approach. Basically, we are committed to ensuring that every sip is an experience in taste.”

He continued, “I’m privileged to have the opportunity to navigate the ship of generational history and serve as a steward of my parents’ cherished legacy. Sharing this profound responsibility with my dedicated wife and our children is, without a doubt, my favorite part of this role. Being a part of an establishment that holds such significance within the community is a unique and deeply rewarding experience, and it’s a source of pride and inspiration in my everyday work.”

At the same time, operating a small, standalone historic restaurant is inherently challenging. One big challenge is striking the delicate balance between honoring the Inn’s rich history and keeping up with the ever-evolving tastes and expectations of today’s paying public. “It requires us to continually reinvent ourselves while staying true to the essence of our heritage,” Reges said. “This process is a constant and sometimes arduous journey, but it’s a journey we gladly undertake to ensure our continued relevance in today’s dynamic culinary landscape.”

When Mark Reges embarked on his journey to steward Old Angler’s Inn after his mother passed, he brought with him a wealth of experience gained from managing a successful law practice and a private company. But he quickly realized that the restaurant business is a unique and exceptional challenge.

“I can confidently say that hospitality is the most demanding industry I’ve ever been involved in, yet it is also one of the most re-

warding,” he stated. “Early on, I received a piece of business advice that has remained with me throughout this challenging but gratifying endeavor: ‘Stay true to your vision and be ever vigilant about your prime costs of labor and cost of goods sold.’ This advice has served as a guiding principle, reminding me of the importance of upholding our restaurant’s distinctive identity while maintaining a watchful eye on every aspect of our operation.”

And Reges was quick to offer counsel to anyone reading this article who is also in his position or aspires to be one day: “Certainly, for those who are managing or aspiring to manage a historic or prestigious bar, tavern, or restaurant, I would offer this piece of advice: Respect the history. It can be tempting to consider erasing the history, the decor, or the style and start afresh in the pursuit of attracting new patrons. However, this approach, while it may appear as a quick way to generate interest, often comes with high risks and short-term gains. What initially seems like a promising strategy can lead to the ultimate downfall of the establishment, resulting in obscurity. The history of a historic place is its anchor, providing a sense of continuity and stability through the years. As an owner, it’s essential to fully embrace and celebrate the storied past of your establishment. This is what will consistently draw people back, time and time again.”

He added, “I maintain an unwavering sense of optimism when it comes to the future of Old Angler’s Inn. The fact that my wife and I are second-generation owners is, in itself,

a remarkable story. It’s a rare occurrence for businesses to pass down through generations, especially in an industry as challenging as hospitality. Most businesses face substantial hurdles and often fail within their first five years, yet here we are, proudly celebrating our 66th year of [family] operation with no intention of slowing down. Furthermore, we’re actively in the process of transitioning the business to our four children and their spouses, marking the beginning of the third generation’s involvement!” ■

