



# THE MANOR TAVERN

## STILL HORSING AROUND AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLI MIX PHOTOGRAPHY

**A** lot of places have a plaque or some type of marker that says “George Washington Slept Here” or something to that effect. But the Manor Tavern in Monkton is able to boast that our first President’s horse actually slept there! Once upon a time, this 267-year-old property was a stable. And, yes, while our country’s greatest founding father slept somewhere else locally, his horse stayed on the premises.

Over the years, the property has evolved into a blacksmith’s shop, a general store, and a saloon. Today, it is a wonderful restaurant, bar, and catering business, and its logo – inclusive of a horse – is a tip of the hat to Monkton’s historic roots. This certainly makes the Manor Tavern an excellent place to feature in our ongoing series of articles on the historic bars and restaurants of the Old Line State.

The Tavern is run by Jerry Edwards. From 1981 to 2020, he was founder and owner of Chef’s Expressions Catering and Events, which has twice been named The National Catering Company of the Year. Edwards, who holds an honorary doctorate in hospitality, said during a recent interview with the Beverage Journal, “We merged Chef Expressions Catering, which was my company for many years, with the Manor Tavern. Now, I’m the General Manager of the entire operation.

**Jerry Edwards**  
General Manager  
The Manor Tavern



Sam Sara manages the restaurant, and we have another GM for our catering division.”

Edwards says he and staff specialize in serving “elevated comfort food. We call it ‘modern country cuisine.’ Things that you would consider ‘country food’ like shrimp and grits, we put a modern twist on it to make the presentation look more elegant than what a bowl of shrimp and grits would look like.”

But it’s the Manor Tavern’s drinks menu that really makes it stand out. The bar menu changes seasonally. So, four times a year, customers get treated to new cocktails and concoctions. “We have a big garden where we grow all of our own herbs,” Edwards noted. “We grow some fruit there, too. And

they end up in the drinks at the different times of the year. We have also grown some edible flowers this year, and you’ll see some of them in the cocktails. It also helps that a couple of our bartenders have been with us for over 10 years. They’re quite experienced.

And we have a regular bar crowd who literally come in almost every night. These are literally the same seven or eight guys who come in every night. Hey, [laughing] bless ‘em. They pay my bills!”

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**Sam Sara**  
*Manager*  
**The Manor Tavern**

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ernized and up to date,” he urged. “That’s the big thing. These days, technology plays such a big role in efficiency and marketing. So if you have bad Wi-Fi or a bad POS system, you have to upgrade to modern times and standards.”

He continued, “Modernize where you can without affecting the ambiance and beauty of the location. We totally renovated the aesthetics of the place. We’ve taken down all of the old wallpaper. We tore up the old carpeting and put in hardwood floors. There’s been a lot of cosmetic changes. If people haven’t been here in a while and remember the Manor Tavern being kind of dingy, it’s not that anymore. Some of our regulars were not thrilled with some of the changes we’ve made in upgrading. But now they love it!”

Edwards definitely speaks with the voice of experience. In 2008, he was inducted into the NACE Hall of Fame. Seven years later, he was honored as a National Industry Icon by the hospitality community. He has won more than 50 industry competitions, including: Baltimore’s Best Crab Soup, three ACF Gold Medals, the “Best Chef” for the Meals on Wheels Culinary Extravaganza, The Crystal Toque Award in the Nation’s Capitol, the Special Event Award for best event, Baltimore’s “Iron Chef” competition, and the Mid-Atlantic Taste of Elegance competition.

For him, though, the job is less about accomplishment and more about the personalities he mixes and mingles with each day. “I love the people,” he stated. “I would say that 70 percent of our guests are regulars and 30 percent are first-timers. But we always have customers who tell us, ‘I’ve been coming here since I was 16,’ and now they are of retirement age. ‘It was a dirt-floor bar, and there was a band playing in the basement.’ Well, the basement isn’t big enough for a band,

a historic business or have dreams of one day running such a place, Edwards was quick to give advice. Chiefly is the need to keep up with the times. He and his staff are currently in the midst of planning a bar renovation to make the space larger and more upscale looking. “We’ve already done that with the rest of the restaurant,” he pointed out. “The bar is the last thing we’re getting to. It’s more a logistical decision than a business one because of the way the building is designed and built. You really need to have a good infrastructure that’s mod-





but whatever. We love our regulars.”

He also loves the fun that comes with operating such a historic place. He said, “We have one urban legend. Walter! Walter is a guy who worked here years and years ago. There is a painting of him hanging in the saddle room bar. He has a pipe and he’s dressed like someone from the 1800s. There have been many situations where people have heard doors opening and closing. In the basement wine cellar is where most of the activity happens. I’ve never personally

encountered Walter. Well . . . OK, I was in the wine cellar once, and I kept hearing this tapping. But it was probably a pipe. Probably! [laughing] At any rate, Walter is the ghost of the Manor Tavern. He doesn’t show himself very often. But when he does, people definitely report it.”

Looking ahead, Edwards sees blue skies for the Manor Tavern. “I am very optimistic,” he concluded. “COVID put us back at square one. But now we’re growing the business again. We are at 20 percent above last

year in terms of restaurant sales. Catering is 140 percent up from last year. I’m literally turning away 25 percent of the leads that come in right now because we don’t have enough labor. We’re a premier caterer. We will only deliver the best food and service to our customers, so I’m not going to book an extra event and then not be able to deliver our A+ product. But staffing is the struggle everyone is having right now. We’re just glad to see our restaurant sales up.” ■

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