



We are family: Inspired by her mother, Gilson opens The Back Bar with a 'homey' approach in old Laurie's

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EDWARDSVILLE - The word "family" will be ever present in the new Back Bar establishment at 228 N. Main St. in Edwardsville next to Wildey Theatre.

Marion Gilson, the new owner of The Back Bar, returns to lead the old back bar of Laurie's Place in Edwardsville. Gilson was the former manager of the old bar. For her, it is like coming home, and also she will be thinking about her late, mother, Sheila, when the bar opens at 2 p.m. Friday, Dec. 7. There will be a highly visible photo of Marion and her mom together in the bar for endless patrons to see. Marion said her mother was her best friend and she described her as "a little spitfire from England."

"There is something about this place," she said of where the new Back Bar will be located. "I remember coming to this place when it was Spanky's in high school, then Laurie's. There has always been a good, homey, feeling about this place. This was home for many in the area. We even had college kids upset when Laurie's closed taking bricks out for a souvenir."

Marion's father will be present Friday and there is a display on the wall that is a reminder of his all other veterans' service to their country.

Marion said her mother and father showed her strong support throughout her life.

"My mom was always my biggest supporter no matter what I did," Marion said. "I was the middle child and a single mom and she always was there for me. Even though not here on Friday, I know my mom will be present. My mom has always inspired me to do better things."

The Back Bar owner said there have been many kids who introduced them to their future spouses in the old establishment and she said she has even been invited to some weddings and even funerals because of her work.

When Laurie's closed, Marion immediately went to work attempting to get part of it reopened again under a different name. She said Randy Gori, the new owner of the building, has been absolutely wonderful to work within the renovation process. Marion said people will be in for a treat when they see a completely renovated inside from the bar to flooring. The front half of the old Laurie's Place will become a new location for Source Juicery in 2019.

"Chrissy Howard and Randy Gori have been amazing through this process," Marion said. "Randy had to take care of all the sprinklers and put up whole new paneling and the place has been gutted and ripped up. The walls have been painted. I think people are in for a great surprise when they see how it looks. Randy wants to give Edwardsville a facelift and why not? He is doing some incredible things in Downtown Edwardsville."

Entertainment will be a big fixture at the new The Back Bar. Bands will be playing on Friday and Saturday nights in December and on Thursday there will be a DJ or karaoke.

To start, Marion said about seven will be employed. Stephanie Juen, a long-time friend, will manage The Back Bar, Marion added.

"I have known Stephanie since I was seven years old," she said. "She is my neighbor and lives across the pond."

The new Back Bar will not have food to start, but Marion invites people to have food delivered or bring in things to eat. She said the Back Bar will have a wide variety of beers and drinks, wine and mixed drinks and the tapped products will be brought piped in from downstairs with a new and refined system.

And for those who wonder about Stag, it will be offered in bottles for those who want to give it a try. Coors Lite will again be a staple on tap, along with a Blue Moon, Boulevard, Miller Lite, and others. The back patio of The Back Bar will open in the spring, Marion said.

On Friday night, it will be an emotional night and the person she will be thinking of the most will be her beloved mother.

"I can't tell you how much I wish my mom was here to celebrate with me," Marion said, holding back tears. "I do know she will be here, though, in spirit."





