

George's Local Brew: Tennessee Whiskey, Hometown Pride

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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JERSEYVILLE - With a neon sign, wooden bar, exposed brick and killer sound system, George's Local Brew has the downtown Nashville feel with the small-town Jerseyville charm.

The bar pulls in customers from St. Louis to Springfield with its specialty steaks, mules and frothy drafts. Everything about the bar, from its name to its success, can be credited to the owners' family-oriented approach.

“As soon as I got the keys and walked in it, I said, ‘Wow. This has got potential. It’s got potential for a bar,’” owner George “Chris” Lorton said. “We ended up just putting it all together, and we opened it up as a family project.”

Chris hadn’t planned to open the most popular restaurant in Jersey County; he originally bought the property with goals to renovate and rent it out. But a few weeks later, Chris and his wife, Brenda, took a weekend trip to Nashville. They stepped into Tootsies Orchid Lounge on Broadway and immediately shared a look of understanding: They needed to bring this to Jerseyville.

The enthusiasm of the Lortons’ four adult children sealed the deal. When the kids heard their parents had bought a bar, they were quick to make it their own. Chris and Brenda found they didn’t mind being along for the ride.

“As kids get older, they pay less and less attention to their dad and mom. They’re doing their own things. But now all of a sudden I was the center of attention, which I loved,” Chris laughed.

They made plans over family dinners and weekend barbecues. It quickly became a passion project and a group effort.



Brenda, who prioritizes quality, took over developing the menu after she had to forbid Chris from ordering the cheapest fries; today, George’s is known for their “skinny fries” and fresh ingredients.

Oldest daughter Jenna was another driving force behind the bar's success. Chris laughs as he remembers how she insisted on buying copper mugs in which to serve mules. He warned her the mugs would be stolen, but gave in. One day, Jenna was bussing a table and mentally calculating drink orders, which led to her running after a bus of customers to track down three missing mule mugs.

Michael worked his way through college in the bar's kitchen. Now, he's an electrical engineer who helped design the alpine coaster at Aerie's Winery, and lucky guests at George's can spin the "Wheel of George" and win a free ride. Meanwhile, their son George carries both the family name and the business side of the restaurant; he received a degree in business and managed the bar for years. And when she's not working as a nurse in St. Louis, daughter Cadi can often be found singing on the stage like a classic country star.

"I went to great detail to try to make it like a Nashville bar," Chris explained. "You could put George's anywhere. You put it in downtown Chicago, you put it in New York City, wherever, it'd be a goldmine."

And that rings true in Jerseyville. The family built George's Local Brew, but the family atmosphere and hometown pride made it successful. Chris and Brenda aim to "greet and seat" every customer who walks in the door. Local bands play on a stage inside the bar on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. In the summertime, bands can also play outside on the roof overlooking diners on the patio. The masonry walls on either side project the music over the town's main street.



As Chris reflects on the bar's success, he can't help but share the story behind the bar's name, which is printed on a plaque that hangs in the restaurant. It might surprise customers to learn that the George of George's Local Brew is actually a reference to George Washington. Robert Lorton served under Washington in the 4th Virginia Infantry during the Revolutionary War. After his discharge, Robert and his family settled on government land a few miles from what is now White Hall, Illinois. Lorton Prairie in Greene County is still farmed by Lortons today.

But the land wasn't the only thing that got passed down. The name George became a family tradition, going back centuries now. It was only fitting to give the family bar the name that so many Lorton men share.

Live music, cold drinks and hand-cut steaks are all available at George's Local Brew. The community staple brings Tennessee fun to Jerseyville's hometown family environment. No matter what you're in the mood for, you can find it at George's.

"We're a fun place to go, a good place to come have some dinner, some entertainment," Chris said. He paused, then laughed and added, "You don't have to make a four-hour trip to Nashville."

For more information, visit the [George's Local Brew website](#) or [Facebook page](#).