

THE NORTHSIDE CHRONICLE

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Town Talk Mike's Beer Bar & North Shore Tavern

By Anna Yoder | Columnist

There are many choices in the Northside to buy your soft drinks, adult beverages, and have a bite to eat. Many of those establishments are also good stewards of their neighborhood and community. Mike's Beer Bar & North Shore Tavern along with East Street Beer are three such businesses that not only serve cold drinks but they serve their community as well.

Part 1 will feature Mike's Beer Bar and North Shore Tavern, and next month Part 2 will feature East Street Beer.

Sometimes when you meet a person, you realize that there is more to them than what meets the eye. This idiom is certainly true when it comes to describing the unassuming and down to earth Mike Sukitch, owner of Mike's Beer Bar and North Shore Tavern. After reading this column, you will surely see why.

Although self-described as "not overly social," Mike believes in the customer service business it is important to "let people know who you [the owner] are and find out customers' likes and dislikes." And true to his word, that is exactly how my husband and I met Mike years ago having dinner before a Pirates game when he engaged us in conversation about our choice of beverages and favorite foods. We liked Mike right away and became loyal customers.

For Mike, customer service and the "beer business" is all in the family, and his Northside roots run deep. Mike's great-grandfather owned a bar in Spring Hill and his grandparents were one of the first to be issued a license to distribute beer after Prohibition! The beer distributor, aptly named Sukitch's, was also located in Spring Hill where Mike grew up.

After the passing of Mike's grandfather, his dad joined his grandmother in the beer distributor and where Mike, as a kid, lived above.

Ironically, Anita, Mike's wife of 34 years, was also in the "beer business." When Sam Adams started to distribute their beer on a national level, Anita was their first national representative. Clearly, Mike is right when he says it is his "birthright to be in the beer business."

Before opening his Northside businesses, Mike's former professional career took him "overseas" for 22 years. While there, Mike had a vision of owning multi-



Photo by Anna Yoder

Mike Sukitch, owner of North Shore Tavern and Mike's Beer Bar, stands alongside some of the Pittsburgh Pirates jerseys on display in the former restaurant.

ple businesses and after retirement he returned to "family, friends, and the location he knew" and to the "family business" of beer.

Mike found his first business across from PNC Park and explained it was either "fate or luck or both" that he ended up there but it was not "by design." Mike opened Mike's Beer Bar in 2018 and showcased 50 local beers to the beer thirsty crowds that first summer.

I too remember seeing the sandwich board touting the local brews. I took a picture of it, sent it to a beer aficionado friend, and told him he needed to visit this place!

Mike settled on this approach of offering a wide selection of local beers because he firmly believed there were so many great ones and that this offering would "help make his place different than any other bar."

Mike always yearned to own a second destination where he could serve steaks. Mike's Beer Bar was not fully equipped to do this and Mike luckily found a location with a "proper-sized restaurant kitchen," which became North Shore Tavern. North Shore Tavern opened in late 2019, but due to the pandemic temporarily closed in early 2020.

When I asked Mike to describe his business sense

and personality, he replied with the words: "strategic," "laid back," and "loyal." These positive traits combined with hard work and his previous corporate experience are what helped Mike create a plan to deal with the challenges of the pandemic: "Do whatever it takes to stay open" and "keep your staff on the payroll," both of which Mike successfully did.

Mike's Beer Bar offered incredible deals on their takeout-only beverages to avoid wasting the 120 kegs of beer he had on hand. It was a strategic move. Although North Shore Tavern closed temporarily, he reassured his staff they would get through this pandemic and kept them on the payroll by working on its Pirate-themed "make-over." This is coming from someone who does not get rattled and is loyal to his employees.

Mike also offered this insight: If you are "left standing after a crisis" (like the pandemic) you "can accelerate after the crisis." And this is exactly what he did! Mike's businesses not only survived the pandemic, they have flourished. Mike's Beer Bar and North Shore Tavern evolved from just a "baseball-only location" to a "neighborhood

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Town Talk

What a difference beer can make!



Photo by Anna Todor
Sukitch shows off the beer taps at Mike's Beer Bar. Sukitch's family has been involved in the beer industry for many generations.

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place" that we Pittsburghers (and visitors) consider one of the most regularly sought out places to visit at any time of the year.

When visiting Mike's Beer Bar or North Shore Tavern at any given day or time, you will most likely see Mike working alongside his staff. His work hours are not for the faint of heart. Mike explains he is at his businesses so much because "he likes it" and he is there because he "wants to be there not because he has to be."

If you have been fortunate enough to experience the fabulous, sizzling North Shore Tavern's "Steak on a Stone" and always wondered, "Where in the world did Mike come up with THAT idea?!" wonder no more. While working overseas, Mike happened upon a restaurant in Switzerland that offered this unique dining experience which he brought home to the States.

Yet beer, great customer service, and that oh so mouthwatering "Steak on a Stone" are not the only things that are important to Mike. Mike is invested in his community and gives back in numerous ways because he believes "it feels good to help."

If you listen to the radio, read the newspaper, or watch TV, you will learn that Mike's businesses are immersed in community and non-profit organizations. Through his generous participation he has supported numerous fundraisers and events by offering his business venues, making monetary donations, sponsoring events, donating food, etc. And the list

goes on and on. It is by word of mouth that people come to meet with Mike and ask for help. And he is there ready, willing, and able.

There are little things like offering a special lunch menu for my annual charity Memorial Day bike ride to being the presenting sponsor of the Steel City Duck Derby — an annual event held by the non-profit Partners For Quality Foundation in which 10,000 "adopted" ducks are launched in Lake Elizabeth of Allegheny Commons Park. The proceeds of this annual event benefit the Partners For Quality family of nonprofit agencies that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and behavioral health challenges.

Tami Rippy, Director of Special Events at Partners for Quality, cannot say enough about the ways Mike staunchly supports their organization. Tami said that Mike "always goes above and beyond getting involved with [their] fundraising events" and has also donated his venues for their Celebrity Bartender Event and Comedy Night.

Greg Jena, Executive Director of Communications at Partners for Quality, emphasized that "Mike's support helps make [their] events successful" which in turn raises the "much-needed money that enhances [their] programs and services." Tami and Greg were very complimentary too of Mike's managing partner, Tiffany Fall, and all his staff who they said welcomes everyone with a smile on their faces and a desire to help make the fundrais-

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Town Talk

Sukitch supports young cancer survivors

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ers held at Mike's venues, successful, and fun.

Becoming involved is what helps to fuel Mike. In 2021, YASU — Young Adult Survivors United out of Wexford was a beneficiary from Mike's Beer Bar connection with a Pittsburgh's Crawl for Cancer event. YASU Founder and Executive Director, Stephanie Samolovitch — a young adult cancer survivor herself — made a point to thank Mike in person for his generosity. Stephanie describes their first meeting "confirmed the synergy between [her and Mike] and [their] passions to give back in life." From that point on, they have "stayed connected" and Stephanie considers Mike a "mentor" which has led to "more partnership opportunities" for YASU.

Mike's involvement with YASU includes offering his venues for their holiday party and donating proceeds from selected beer sales. Most notably, Mike sponsors their "Wig Out" event which is a huge Halloween party where attendees wear wigs to honor and support young adult cancer survivors. This event raises money for programs to provide "emotional, social, and financial support" for cancer survivors.

Mike's team supported the Wig Out event not only by participating in the auctions but, according to Stephanie, went "above and beyond" by attending the 2023 event wearing Halloween wigs to support the theme. Stephanie ardently describes Mike "as the most humble and kindest guy" and his support as "heartfelt."

Why does Mike do it? He simply says because it "feels good to help" and "it's the right thing to do." One way to sum up all of Mike's good works came from Greg Jena from Partners For Quality who refers to Mike as a "difference maker." Wow — that is a powerful statement and a true testament to a man who does make a difference in our community. Thanks Mike, for being there for us. You are much more than beer and we are truly grateful.

Fun fact:

The portraits of famous Pittsburgh Pirates hanging on the front wall of North Shore Tavern were painted by Tom Mosser — the Pirate Parrot from the 1990's!

Mike's Beer Bar and North Shore Tavern are located at 110 and 120 Federal St., respectively. ■