

Welcome Visitors!

The boats are back in the water, the peonies are popping.

We can safely say that summer is upon us. No more snow in the forecast (so far so good), visitors have returned to Vacationland and from Kittery to Fort Kent hordes are lining up for lobster rolls as out-of-state license plates dot the highways and byways.

Signs of rebirth and renewal abound. As we forge forward with plans for the 2018 Maine Hospitality Summit, and step closer to launching HospitalityMaine, revitalization is on our minds.

Revitalizing the hospitality job market, filling vacancies and supporting the next wave of innkeepers and restaurateurs is this association's focus. We can learn from businesses striving to be better every day, like **Old Vines Wine Bar**, our newest member in the spotlight this month. We can get inspired by the crop of scholarship winners touted this month at our annual dinner.

We can learn from this year's Maine Hospitality Summit host city, sending out the signal on the banks of the Penobscot River that visitors are welcome here.

Sip your iced latte (sans straw) and enjoy the June newsletter!

Kathleen Pierce
Director of Member Experience

New member Spotlight: Old Vines Wine Bar



From left, James Warwick, Rick Taranto (front) and Jon Ellms, back.

They bought their favorite bar.

When former owner of Old Vines Wine Bar in Kennebunk decided to sell the community hub in the Lower Village, "we panicked and bought it," said Jon Ellms, a pharmaceutical marketer who was living in Boston and summering in Kennebunkport with his husband Rick Taranto in 2014. "It wasn't on my list of things to do."

Since then, Old Vines has morphed into a dining hot spot attracting locals, tourists, wedding parties and anyone out for a relaxed, high-energy night of American tapas and conviviality. "You can go anywhere in town and get fried seafood, blueberry everything,

lobster rolls," says Ellms, seated on his sprawling patio on a recent spring afternoon. "We wanted to do something different."

By his side, partners Taranto and James Warwick echo his statements. In four years they have turbo-charged the menu, doubled the kitchen space, created a dining room upstairs, and added a roster of must-attend social events. Along the way they have quadrupled sales, retained a loyal staff, expanded their customer base and are having a blast. Here's what they've learned:

Create loyal clientele: "Loyalty is inspired by the consistency of your servers. People love to hang out with our employees, share stories. We hear all the time 'I just came in and they were so friendly.' But they are not just friends, they are providing great service.

Everybody that walks through that door within seconds is acknowledged, it's a small thing. We don't take ourselves very seriously, we don't beat our chest," said Elms.

Key to success: Casual doesn't mean careless.

Pay attention to detail. "A lot of thought goes into our team, our menu, our space. You don't see all the work going on behind the scenes that gives you a casual experience," said Taranto. "It's not blind luck."

Retaining staff: "Take care of employees and they take care of you and your customers," said Taranto. Each March the owners whisk the entire staff away on a seven-day cruise.

"I don't think they stay because of the cruise, but I think it's symbolic," said Ellms.

Offering a 401K package and health care "differentiates us as an employer." So does a shared tip model for front-of-house staff. "It creates a sense of pride," said Warwick who emulated a system from his native England. "Everyone is willing to do more." Including staff in sales performance reviews builds a sense of ownership and teamwork.

Motto: Never stop trying to be better. "Unless you are trying to be the best, top of your game and different, you might as well roll over. The day we do that is the day we will decide to sell," said Warwick.

Why did you join the Maine Restaurant Association?

"Because we don't know what we don't know. Things around music licensing, labor issues ... I look at it from a risk standpoint. What is going to get us in trouble? I want to avert those problems," said

Ellms. "Having an outside, independent, third party, unbiased resource should be great. And also to get some visibility, because we are still a little tiny wine bar in the middle of a little, tiny seasonal town."

Member milestones



Vacationland Inns' operations manager Rhonda Graziosi (center in above photo) is named employee of the year by the Greater Bangor Convention and Visitors Bureau. Starting in the Brewer location in 2007 she transformed the property with her friendly, unwavering dependability.

* Cafe Miranda in Rockland turns 25 this month

In 2007 a cafe fire presented owner Kerry Altiero with a metaphysical moment. He took the tragedy as a message from above to improve his game.

A quarter century later the cafe has grown from six to 30 employees and launched Rockland as an epicurean destination. Now entering adulthood, Cafe Miranda is going "back to the roots of what we are about. Which is passion and people who care," said Altiero.

* Liquid Riot in the Old Port turns five

* Vena's Fizz House turns five too, dance party set for Sunday.

* Blyth & Burrows in Portland made it to year one!

Fishy Business



Got halibut? Is it tagged? If you are buying Maine-caught halibut direct from fishermen this season ask to see the blue tag.

"Most restaurants don't know they need to be buying tagged fish," said Ben Martens, executive director of the [Maine Coast Fishermen's Association](#).

To avoid black market sales, look for a colored tag attached to the tail or head of the fish.

Because halibut is a "rebuilding resource" that is overfished, each Maine fisherman is allowed to land and sell 25 from now until June 20.

"Restaurants should feel good about buying local," said Martens, and strive to avoid procuring unmarked fish.

Get licensed: Retail businesses buying shellfish from certified dealers need to renew retail seafood licenses annually. If buying live lobster, clams, shell fish, scallops, shrimp directly from a harvester an enhanced license is required. [Brush up on the rules](#)

Inn-ovation: Migis Hotel Group jettisons straws



Paper straw in a cocktail at Higgins Beach Inn. Photo by Kristen Levesque

Plastic straws are now a dirty word at the bar. They don't biodegrade and the hospitality industry is a power user. Portland-based Migis Hotel Group decided to 86 plastic sippers companywide this season.

"If you order a drink you won't get a straw," said Peter Twatchman, group COO and partner.

Mindful of the environment and the legacy of the company's century old properties, such as the Black Point Inn, ditching plastic straws made sense. And was painless.

"As we look at our operations across three states, we believe we can impact the removal upwards of 500,000 straws per season from our operations - not an insignificant number," said Migis's director of operations Phil Kronenthal, who also oversees hotels in Massachusetts and South Carolina.

The goal is to positively impact "this wonderful place we work in. It's so simple, people overthink it," said Twatchman.

This summer guests quenching their thirst at one of their six Maine inns will be given paper straws or wooden stirrers upon request.

What is the reaction? So far, Migis's strawless stance was questioned by 2 percent of its guests. A trained staff is the best approach, says Twatchman who encourages more hotel and restaurant owners to follow their lead. "It's in the news enough now that people get it."

Maine Hospitality Summit news



This fall we set up camp in Bangor for the 2018 Maine Hospitality Summit.

Our keynote speaker is [Travis Mills](#), the American soldier who lost his limbs while fighting in the Afghanistan War. Mills shares his story of strength and resilience. Watch [his gripping story here](#).

Expand your hospitality network and gain a competitive edge while kicking back and celebrating with your peers on the Penobscot River.

More details will be revealed in coming weeks. In the meantime, put October 29 and 30th on your calendar. Registration opens soon.

Hospitality for Habitat has another successful year



This year more than 20 inns participated in Maine Innkeepers Association' [shoulder season promotional philanthropic event](#). Members big and small across the state discounted rooms in exchange for guest's \$35 donation to Habitat for Humanity.

Our CEO Steve Hewins collected more than \$1,000 from Inn by the Sea's general manager Michael Briggs (pictured) in late May.

"It incentivizes people to come to Maine in the slow period and try inns, hotels and resorts they might not have ever tried," said Rauni Kew, the inn's public relations manager.

Though total tallies are not yet in this year, "last year we donated about \$24,000 to Habitat for Humanity," said Hewins. "Lots of people are coming back in the early season in April because they love the program so much. Giving something back is part of their vacation."

We have been running this program since 2004 and our participating members have raised more than \$250,000. Thanks for your support!

Summer employment incentives announced

State steps in with new grant program for hiring teens

A new and needed initiative by the Department of Labor was announced last week called Getting to [YES: Youth Employment and the Steps to Success](#).

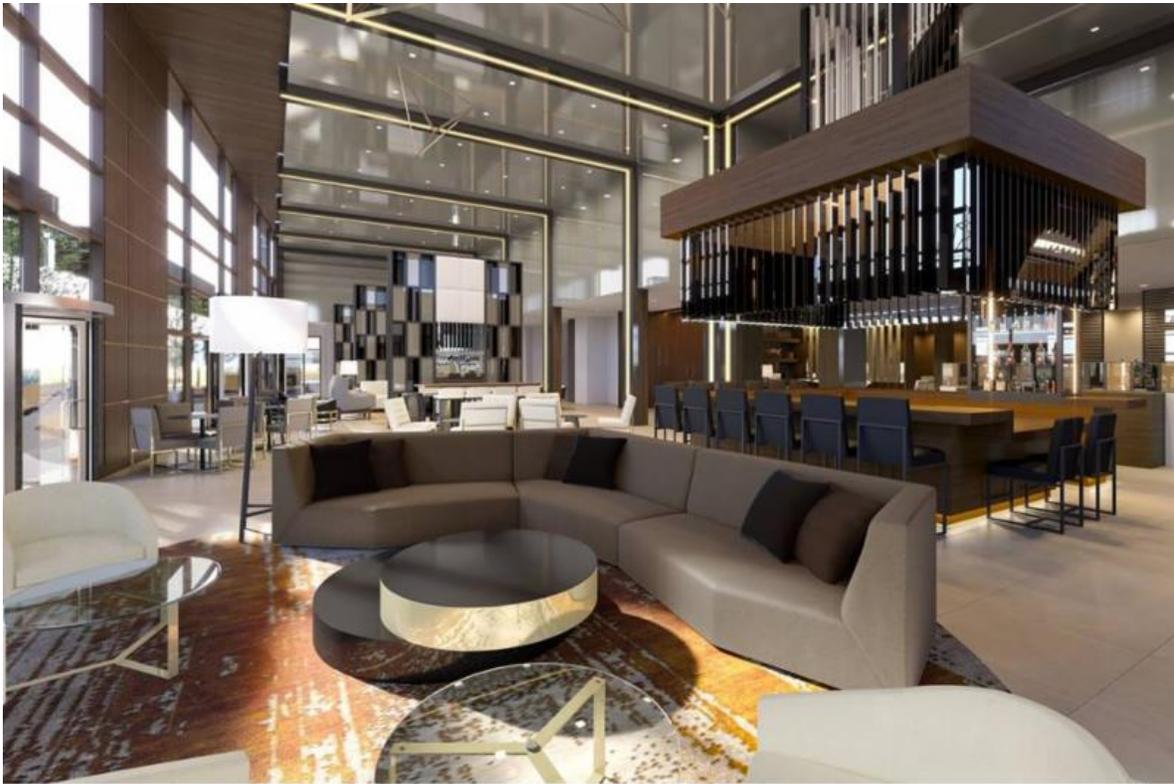
Works like this: Employers can apply to receive a \$400 grant for each new

entrant they hire. Being hailed as a solution for the non-existent training wage in the state, [YES is designed to spur 14 and 15 year olds into the workforce](#) to fill the labor gap.

Labor commissioner John Butera told the Press Herald "I think it's critical that we look to our youth cohort to provide our future workforce."

Members are encouraged to post job openings on the [state's joblink page](#).

Membership meter! See who joined us in the last month



AC Hotel Portland opens in late June on Commercial Street.

**AC Hotel Portland
Porthole Restaurant and Pub
The Wooden Spoon
Bear Mountain Inn
Tea Pond Lodge and Cabins**

Legislative Lowdown

Greg Dugal's bi-weekly e-report puts you in the know.



The June edition focuses on:

Merits of hiring teen employees

Fed Tip Pooling Rule explained

November ballot questions breakdown

[Read it HERE](#)

Media Watch

People magazine named Portland one of the [10 hottest food cities in the U.S.A.](#) Shoutout to member Highroller Lobster Co., who shares space with Eventide Oysters as must-eats locales.

Viva Puerto Rico. Sebasco Resort is [hiring workers from Puerto Rico](#) this season to counter the H-2B temporary shortage. Resort owner Bob Smith hired a half-dozen Puerto Ricans last summer for housekeeping, landscaping and kitchen work and this summer is doubling the number.

Speaking of summer help, [The Portland Press Herald put a sunny spin on the tourism outlook](#) in Maine this summer. "Bookings in the spring and winter were pretty strong, I think that gives people a lot of confidence that it will continue through the rest of the year," our CEO Steve Hewins told the paper.

Industry Trends

HomeAway joins Airbnb [adding hotels to its online bookings](#). By partnering with Expedia for room listings, the prevailing wisdom is "the more inventory the better," reports travel site Skift.

Meanwhile, [eMarketer downgrades Airbnb's dominance in the marketplace](#) as competition and security concerns mount.

Rockland passes a [food sovereignty ordinance](#) becoming the first county seat to regulate its local food system. Why? "It just makes good sense," a city councilor tells the Bangor Daily News.

EVENTS

MERA and MEIA Scholarship dinner

What: Celebration of 2018 scholars

When: June 11, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Where: 16 Bay View, Camden

Keynote speaker is [Sean Riley, president of Maine Course Hospitality Group](#)

** Tickets are still available, call 207-213-2060 to join us.*

Annual Golf Classic

When: September 5

Where: Spring Meadows in Gray.

For more info or to sponsor email events@mainerestaurant.com

Maine Hospitality Summit, Bangor

When: Oct. 29 and 30

Location: Downtown, details coming

ServSafe Classes

June 12 - Westbrook

June 21 - Augusta



| send feedback, tips, and suggestions to kathleen@mainerestaurant.com |

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