

# Honor the Work



# Respect the Workers

from *Bartender*, pg. 5

the bouncer” to “Mer the bartender,” as Chumley’s regulars have dubbed her.

Mer is 33 now and has worked at Chumley’s for more than six years. While wages and tips help pay off those loans, Mer also enjoys full benefits: medical, dental, paid vacation and even a 401(k), she said.

The benefits she receives at Chumley’s are not common for bartenders, but then neither is much of the rest of the experience.

“You meet some of the most interesting people,” she said. For instance, she said in conversations with transgendered people she learned, among other things, how sexual preference and gender are not interchangeable.

“You end up being their psychologist, someone to talk to,” she said of her customers, an easy smile stretching across her face. “Some people want to talk about what’s wrong. If by chance I think I may have a solution for it, [then] I’ll say so. If I don’t have an answer, I don’t have a prob-

lem saying so. But you can empathize. Sometimes that’s all anybody needs.”

Mer says a person doesn’t have to dance on top of the bar Coyote Ugly style to be a good bartender; he or she just has to be aware of the customer.

“You have customers...Some of them want to talk and some of them don’t, which works out for me because I’m actually very shy,” she said.

She breaks the interview for a minute to tell Skip, the bartender on duty, that the customer he is serving is the “olive one.”

“He would like three olives, Skip,” she says, talking about a man sitting at the bar wearing a black shirt. Skip stuffs exactly three olives into the man’s Corona. The customer, Mark Forister, nods and smiles at her good memory.

“She has great laughter,” said Forister, a visitor from Rhode Island. “Some bartenders can look at people and know their drinks before they know their names. When they’re sociable and friendly, they make a

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--Mer McKnight

lot of money.”

Knowing who drinks what is all in the job description for Meridith. In fact, that’s the easy part, she said.

“I may not know your name right away but I will know what you drink,” she said. “I figure after the four and a half years I spent at Player’s seeing a thousand people a night, especially during football season...remembering names...My brain is filled up. There’s no more room.”

Sometimes there isn’t room for much conversation.

“When you’re working a 10-hour shift, it’s the longest night of your life,” she said. “That’s one of those nights where the happy

hour starts at 10 [and] you know you’re going to be busy. You’re busting your behind. You don’t have time to think.”

Mer is a night owl, she said, and loves to work the late hours because those are the best time for tips. But sometimes after a very long day it’s hard to turn on the charm.

“Some people don’t realize that when they come in at the end of the night and they’re drunk that they are not making my day,” she said.

While she loves bartending, Mer says she has been thinking about going back to school, maybe feeding her love of horses by studying equine massage therapy.

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I grew up and still don’t,” she said, talking about her experience at Carnegie Mellon.

Eventually, Mer may find a university that offers curriculum in massage therapy for horses. Meanwhile, you can find her at Chumley’s, where she is serving up infectious laughter and a drink she just learned how to make, a Caramel Apple.

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