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Business

Darien Liquor Shop's new owner wants customers to feel at home

John H. Palmer Correspondent



When many people walk into a liquor store looking for a bottle of wine to pair with dinner, they usually find themselves in an expansive store with racks of wines they've never heard of. They pick the closest bottle, or the cheapest, and hope it's a good one. That uncertainty and lack of service is something **John Freehill** hopes to do away with. As a new owner of the Darien Liquor Shop at 49 Tokeneke Road, he wants the customers of the longtime shop to feel like they are at home.

"I care about what the customer wants," he said. "If they don't like something I'll recommend something else. The bottom line is I want to get the best bottle of wine in their hands for them."

He's no stranger to the wine business. Freehill also is part owner of Bruce Park Liquors, located on

Mason Street in Greenwich. A Greenwich native, he cut his teeth in the business after leaving an unsatisfying corporate career and bought the Greenwich shop with his friend Gus Flink about two years ago. Then earlier this year, he found out the Darien store was for sale and decided to expand his business interests.

"It's a nice shop in a nice area with great parking and access to the highway," he said. "I filled it with wines that I know will sell and with customer recommendations because it really is their shop."

Any Darien resident who has been in town for a while is probably familiar with the Darien Liquor Shop, which has been located by the train tracks on Tokeneke Road for about 30 years. For many years it was owned by longtime proprietor Chris Fumega, who passed away about three years ago. The shop was then bought by Mike Mozzola, who then sold it to Freehill and three partners last March.

According to Freehill, the shop has always had the feel of a "Mom and Pop" store, and he hopes to keep it that way. "I want people to come in and take a look around and get a feel for the place."

As you enter the shop, you instantly get the feeling that it's an intimate place. New wooden floors greet the customer underfoot, and wine racks in the center of the store create a wide open feel. Along the walls are more wine racks and shelves filled with various liquors. In the back is a beer cooler filled with the latest brews. Freehill says the store has a walk-in cooler which keeps all the store's beer ice cold, even when it's in storage.

Freehill said he wants to keep his prices competitive and as soon as you can walk in it shows. Greeting customers is several stacks of wine cases that advertise wine choices under \$10 to \$20. While his wines hit every price point, Freehill says his goal is to help his customers find the perfect wine for their budget.

"I try to be honest as I can," he said. "I don't want to be pushy, just a consultant."

Freehill said he plans to continue the tradition of regular wine tastings, and customers can sample wines on Saturday afternoons around 4 p.m. In addition, the store offers free delivery and 10 percent off case purchases of wine.

The Darien Liquor Shop, located at 49 Tokeneke Road, is open Mondays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. For more information, call 655-1682.

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