



J. SCOTT RIDGELL: BUSY AT BUZZY'S

BY TEDDY DURGIN

Unlike most packaged goods stores, Buzzy's Country Store in St. Mary's County doesn't have to do much to generate ... well ... buzz. It's been around in one form or another for decades. The current proprietor, J. Scott Ridgell, has been a part of the store since he was a child as his father, Clarence, and mother, Jean, bought the business from Jean's dad in 1954. Clarence operated the store until his death in 2007, passing the torch to J. Scott.

One of the first questions Ridgell fielded 12 years ago from locals was: "Are you going to change the name?" It wasn't even a consideration. "Buzzy was my dad," Ridgell said, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*. "My mom still refers to him as 'Bussy.' When he was a boy, he was the third youngest of 12, and he was always 'busy.' But he preferred Buzzy. So, when I took over in 2007, everyone wanted to know, 'Are you gonna change the name?' And I'd answer, 'Why?' Everyone knows us as 'Buzzy's!'"

Clarence and Jean lived at and operated the store. So, it was truly J. Scott's home throughout his childhood and ado-



lescence. He recalled. "It was a general store, and we didn't sell liquor or wine. It was strictly beer. Back in those days, these places were known as 'gro-bars' -- combination grocery stores and bars. You could actually come in, drink a beer on premise, give the grocer your list, and he would fill your order. Through the years, gro-bars gave way to 7-11's and the like. Very few of us are left. We're technically a store. But, in reality, we're a bar. The law grandfathered us in, having transferred the license from dad's name to mine."

Having been at the reins now for more than a decade, Ridgell has come to love the people aspect of the busi-

ness the most. He left a six-figure job with management responsibilities to become the store's operator. But, for him, the intangibles ultimately outweighed money and position.

"It's been very much a homecoming," he stated. "I get to hang out with all of my old running mates, people I used to hang out with and party with. Some of my old friends, I see three or four times a week. [laughing] I forgot how much I liked some of them!"

On the downside, Ridgell wishes the administrative side of the business wasn't so demanding. "You're always juggling paperwork!" he lamented. "I knew the business from the customer service side -- stocking the shelves, sweeping the floors, and so forth. But as far as the paperwork and filing the sales taxes monthly and having to file your employee withholdings, that's pretty hard."

He continued, "When I run into some young buck who's wanting to start his own

business, I tell him, 'You may be good with people and you may be good with sales, but there is a whole paperwork side you're going to need some help with. If you don't know how to do it, you're either going to have to learn or pay somebody to do it.'

Even his long-time friends don't quite grasp how hard Ridgell works. "Some of my buddies are like, 'Wow, you have it great! You get to 'shoot the sh*t' with people all day and laugh," he remarked, shaking his head at their misconception. "But I tell them, 'You don't see the underbelly. You don't see me down here at 7 a.m. having to meet the beer guy, who

wants to work from my end of the county up.'"

Fortunately, Ridgell had a great role model in his father, whose "Clarenceisms" often resonate in his head as he goes about the business of running the business today. "Dad always treated people fairly," Ridgell recalled. "One of his favorite sayings was, 'Don't rip people off.' It's tempting and you can do it. But my dad was always stressing two things, 'Treat people the way you want to be treated' and 'You get what you give.'"

Ridgell has found new counsel as a member of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA). "I like



seeing the big picture," he concluded. "[Membership] has helped me keep an eye on the issues going on. And I really enjoy talking to my fellow members here in the county. Many of these guys have been in the business all their lives. And it's always good joining up with them and going to the meetings. You can't beat the camaraderie!" ■



Is Your Establishment a Member of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA)?

MSLBA—Representing Alcohol Beverage Licensees since 1950

MSLBA is the multicultural, go-to organization for Maryland retail alcohol beverage industry issues. No matter how proficient you are at the operations and management of your business, many factors influencing your success are outside your direct control. Your best chance for competently and successfully dealing with external forces such as legislation, regulation, suppliers, enforcement agencies and prohibition efforts, is by joining with other retailers for reputable representation through MSLBA.

Contact MSLBA for Membership Information:

Phone: (410) 871-1377 • **FAX:** (410) 871-2545 • **E-Mail:** MSLBAmembers@msn.com

Please provide the following:

Name of County or City Alcohol Licensing Board for Your Establishment: _____

Your Name: _____ Phone: () _____

Business Name: _____

Business Physical Address: _____