

Meet *the* MEMBERS



THE BII'S STRENGTH IS IN THE DIVERSITY OF OUR MEMBERSHIP: OVER THESE SIX PAGES, WE MEET THREE MEMBERS FROM VERY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS WHO ALL SHARE A LOVE OF THE INDUSTRY



HOLLY MILLIN MBII

HOLLY MILLIN MBII IS CELEBRATING HER FIRST YEAR AT THE ARTICHOKE IN CHARTHAM, KENT. THE BII'S PETER BASKETT MBII SPEAKS TO HER TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE LAST 12 MONTHS

Holly Millin MBII recently celebrated her first year as landlady of the historic Artichoke pub in Chartham, Kent, which has served as the village spot for great food and drink for more than 700 years.

This traditional pub is packed full of character, having preserved much of its original architecture, from the old oak beams to the exposed brickwork. Back in the 1650s, the Artichoke was owned by Richard Marsh, who turned the site into a brewery before going on to found Shepherd Neame in Faversham.

Holly tells how she has embraced the pub's rich history, while running it as a modern business. "This was the first pub that the Shepherd Neame family bought, so it's quite special to them in terms of the history.... There's quite a lot on display about the pub's past, in the way of paintings, photographs and newspaper clippings from over the years, particularly information relating to the renovations of the pub. We like to keep as much as we can."

Customers are equally appreciative of its classic look and feel, with the pub's most popular table being the repurposed well that was uncovered during a flood half a century ago. Rather than cover up the well, it was fitted with a glass top to create a table, allowing diners to see directly into the well below. Back in the days when the building was a brewhouse, the water from the well was used to brew beer, which serves to make it a focal point of the building's history.

MODERN DAY BUSINESS

Fast forward to today, and Holly runs the pub as a modern business, keeping up with the industry and trends to stay relevant to her customers.

A prime example of this is how she has responded to the increasing demand for vegetarian and vegan options – even among those who eat meat – with the menu at the Artichoke now offering as many plant-based as meat options.

"When you do your Sunday roast, it's important to appeal to vegans too. Often, I think vegans just get stuck with a nut roast, so we like to include options that people might want to eat. The market definitely demands you cater for different dietary requirements."

Being inclusive and making sure there's an offer for everyone is important to Holly, who also caters for larger groups, social and community events. A recent buffet she hosted for 50 people included 10 vegetarians and one vegan, that's more than 20% of the group, and she believes it is important that they feel as included and welcomed as anyone.

COST CUTTING

Asking Holly about what she's doing to manage the current energy price hike and cost of living increases,



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she explained that she is saving energy and managing money more effectively. “From turning my kitchen equipment off in the afternoon, when we’re not trading in the kitchen, to making sure that washing loads are full – we’ve looked at every area of the business to make savings. I’ve also gone from a monthly to a weekly payroll to help manage cash flow better.”

“Another thing I’ve done to help manage my costs is to set up standing orders to pay utility bills in advance, so I don’t get a £1,000 bill through the door that I will be struggling to pay.”

CHALLENGES

Having initially made the decision to close the pub on Mondays and Tuesdays, due to the chef shortages and finding herself tied to the kitchen, Holly is now looking to open seven days a week, having talked it through with a friend and fellow publican.

“It’s about creating an offer that’s good enough to draw people in. If you think about it, you work four days to pay your rent and your beer order. If you open for those extra two days, and you’ve made that money and paid

the bills, anything you earn after that is a bonus. Even if you only earned £200 after you’ve paid everyone, that’s still £200 in the bank.”

Holly is also encouraging customers as they pay the bill to book ahead the next time they visit, to help alleviate some of the challenges of staffing. They are given a small card with their bill, which includes the pub’s contact details.

“I give people the card and say ‘it would really help us if you book next time.’ We get a lot of walkers from Canterbury and if they just give us a heads up that they were coming, it would be a lot easier to manage staff.”

Holly is a strong believer in marketing the business and uses social media and leaflet drops to spread the word about the Artichoke. Pensioners, she says, looking to save a bit of money aren’t usually on social media, so they need you to physically market directly to them in their homes. And she encourages staff, in their downtime, or when the pub isn’t busy, to come up with some ideas about how to attract new customers.

Staff at the Artichoke have access to an iPad and Smartphones and engage in social media to promote the pub too. She explains: “They can follow on social media customers of local pubs. If someone is following a pub, then you know that they are interested and local. It’s time consuming, but when it’s quiet it’s good to use the



time to market the business and bring customers in.”

Finding staff isn’t easy, not only because of the recruitment crisis but due to the pub’s location outside of town.

“If people don’t drive, there’s only one train an hour from Canterbury and the last train might be after the pub’s closing time. So, we try to employ

locals from the village and then help to develop them, if they’re younger and don’t have the skills.”

Holly trains her staff both in-house and by using CPL’s online learning courses, as she says there is a value in staff receiving certificates as evidence of their progress.

Holly is careful not to underestimate the power of recommendations. “Every function is an opportunity to sell another function,” she says. “People will remember, so the next time that there’s a wake, a Christmas party or a baby shower being planned, they’ll say ‘oh, we went to this really good pub, why don’t you try there?’”

It has been great seeing all the fantastic work Holly has done at the Artichoke in her first year, and we look forward to seeing her grow and thrive alongside the historic pub for years to come. ■



The Artichoke’s beautiful interior makes a feature of the old well – reversioned as a table (above)



BII BENEFITS

As an active member of the BII, Holly says that her most-used benefit is the Staff Contract Builder, as it is quick and simple to use and saves her a lot of headaches. She also finds good value in the HR helpline: “It’s just so good to get an answer to a quick question that might have been worrying you, or have been on your mind for a while.”