



## Boynton's Taproom taps into owner's talents

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Once upon a time, Manchester was going to be the site of a unique and ground-breaking educational institution where the curriculum -- not unlike my own education, coincidentally -- was to be focused entirely on beer.

It was called the Labatt USA Beer Academy, and back in March 2000, a gentleman named Ernie Iamundo was the designated headmaster.

Those who were fortunate enough to get into the Beer Academy were there to study ways to sell and market Labatt's expansive "international portfolio" of beers. Back then, that portfolio included the Labatt's label, of course, plus Stella Artois, Dos Equis, Bohemia, Carta Blanca, Carlsberg, Boddington's and many, many more.

Alas, after investing a year of his life in the design and construction of the Beer Academy, Ernie Iamundo was killed. He died in a car crash just one day after a gala open house in the gloriously renovated space on the third floor of the Fratello's building in the Millyard.

The spirit of the Labatt USA Beer Academy seemed to die along with Ernie, and in the nine years since his passing, the space he lovingly transformed has been a place in search of a purpose.

Josh Boynton thinks he's found one.

Those of you who read this newspaper on a regular basis may recognize that name. Josh is a local guy -- Central High, '92 -- with degrees from Keene State and New England College, but perhaps his greatest notoriety came when he was honored as one of the Union Leader's "40 Under 40" back in 2007.

He won that recognition for his work as president and CEO of Lifeshare Management Group. His disability services company places cognitively impaired or developmentally disabled persons in private homes, and does so at a fraction of the cost of state-run facilities.

However, as admirable as his other business ventures may be, I am happy to report that Josh will soon add "entertainment impresario" to his resume.

He will do so as the proprietor of Boynton's Taproom, a comedy, music and theater venue in the space once occupied by the Labatt USA Beer Academy.



Josh and Rachel Boynton at Boynton's Taproom. (COURTESY)

And yes, Boynton's Taproom will serve beer -- wine and food, too -- but Josh admits it's more about scratching a show-biz itch he's had for years.

"I've always had two passions in my life," he said. "One was helping people and the other was theater. My dad worked at Easter Seals for most of his adult life. I grew up around individuals with disabilities, which ultimately lead to the start of LifeShare, but I had done some small-scale professional theater stuff -- I even produced 'Hair' back in college -- and I always wanted to get back into that."

Scale was everything for Josh, so he searched and searched for a venue that was just the right size for the shows he wanted to produce, and he found it upstairs from Fratello's.

He had looked at the space shortly after Ernie Iamundo's death, and while he loved the place, the timing wasn't right. Then, about 18 months ago, he got a call from the McDonough brothers at Fratello's.

"At the time, we needed some corporate office for LifeShare and the office space by the Beer Academy was a perfect fit," he explained. "Then I started wondering what I could do with the other side."

"I wasn't sure if I wanted to get into the hospitality business, but the more I thought about it -- a place where people can come after work, get a really nice glass of wine or a nice cold beer, some good appetizers and watch folk artists or blues and jazz -- I could do what I always wanted to do."

What he wants to do is put on small-scale theatrical productions for audiences ranging from 50 to 100 patrons.

He wants top-flight comics and he wants musicians who can entertain crowds of a similar size and after an invitation-only party on Wednesday, he's going to start this Friday.

"But Friday's already sold out," he laughed, "and while that's great for us, it's also important to make another point. We're not going to be a bar where you can just stop in for a drink. We're going to be show-based only, so if you don't have a ticket to the show, you're not getting in for food or drink." Your next chance to get in will be on Friday, Dec. 4.

"We're going to do comedy one night a week until the end of the year," Josh said, "but I don't want people to think we're exclusively a comedy club. After the first of the year, we'll have music one night a week as well."

The music bookings will be handled by Scott Hayward, who's had phenomenal success at the Tupelo Music Hall in Londonderry (and if classy acts like Janis Ian, Tom Rush and Shawn Colvin don't float your boat, you're not really a music lover).

"With Scott doing the music, we'll be up two nights a week, and as we get into next year, we'll have a third night with live theater and then, who knows? Perhaps do some film screenings -- rare films, independents -- you know, some Sundance funky stuff."

Meanwhile, the newly renovated kitchen is up and running for the production of an ambitious appetizer and tapas menu -- Van Otis products illuminate the dessert selections -- but just as Josh points out that Boynton's Taproom isn't really a bar, it isn't really a restaurant either.

"If we play our cards right," Josh said, "we're hoping that we can create business for Fratello's and vice versa. Have a full meal there and come see our show or see the show and have something at Fratello's afterward.

"It's not about competition," he added. "It's about complementing what Manchester already has in place. If I can put together a really cool season, because of our size, we wouldn't compete with the Palace or the Verizon but would really complement all the exiting Manchester venues."

I have a feeling that Boynton's Taproom is going to be one classy venue and to find out more, call 623-7778 or go to [www.boyntonstaproom.com](http://www.boyntonstaproom.com).

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