

[WPI]

BERT LAVALLEY

BERT LaVALLEY '07 is CEO of Deadhorse Hill, in partnership with chef Jared Forman and beverage director Sean Woods. The downtown restaurant/café is named for a steep incline that challenged horses—and then motorcars—in bygone centuries. His is also founder of Sustainable Comfort Inc., specializing in energy efficient multifamily homes. *WPI Journal* asked him to share his thoughts on revitalizing Worcester's culinary scene.

WHERE DID YOU LIKE TO EAT WHEN YOU WERE AT WPI? I have always loved Corner Grille up near Tatnuck Square—I used to get their “Aloha Pie” once a week. The Boynton and Tortilla Sam's were also favorite meeting places.

WHAT DREW YOU INTO THE DEADHORSE ENTERPRISE? Sean and I have lived across the hall from each other for a number of years. Our building has a great outdoor patio—a lot of people like to cook outside when the weather is nice, particularly on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Sean would always come out with something to share—a really well-balanced cocktail, or a dish he had been preparing all day. What he produced was unique and interesting, but what always stood out about Sean was how much he cared about taking care of people. When he teamed up with Jared and began planning a restaurant in downtown Worcester, I was excited as a consumer and offered to help anyway I could. I mostly had in mind a conversation or two over a beer. As they walked further down that path, that offer turned into many conversations and eventually a partnership.

Prior to this, my experience in the restaurant industry was the same as most people's—I had eaten at one. WPI taught me how valuable

project partners and mentors can be. I am incredibly lucky to work with these people—I am consistently amazed by their work ethic, creativity, and raw talent. This project would fall flat without them. I am motivated daily to try and keep up.

ANY COMMON GROUND BETWEEN YOUR RESTAURANT WORK AND YOUR SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS? A lot, actually. In both businesses we have a philosophy around taking the long-term view. In the restaurant, that means we source from the local area, focus a lot on the sustainability of the products we use, and try to create an environment where everyone—staff and guests—feels welcome and taken care of. At Sustainable Comfort, we are

working to make buildings more resilient, efficient, and healthy for their occupants. Both things directly impact the quality of people's lives in a, hopefully, very positive way.

SO MANY SAY WORCESTER IS ON THE RISE WHEN IT COMES TO FOOD AND CULTURE.

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THIS? Worcester has a stated goal of having more young professionals educated at the local colleges and universities live and work in the area. One element I think is necessary for that is a robust and diverse culinary scene, and Worcester is growing in that regard. That said, diversity means there should be options at different price ranges and cuisine types—so different people can look for an experience that provides the best value to them.



PHOTO STEVEN KING