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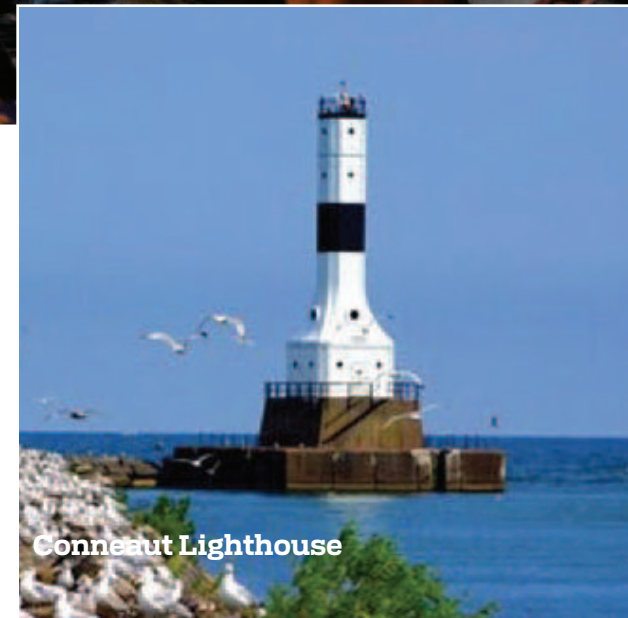
Historic Ashtabula Harbor



Smolen-Gulf Bridge



Kosicek Vineyards



Conneaut Lighthouse

The Thirsty Filly mobile bar started with a 1970s horse trailer

The Thirsty Filly has grown from being a part-time thing to a full time mobile bar business

By Marah Morrison
mmorrison@news-herald.com

The experiences Gregory Johnston gained in New Orleans sparked the idea of opening up a food truck, but after life steered him back to Ohio and after attending a wedding, that idea transformed into what is now The Thirsty Filly.

While in New Orleans, Johnston worked with a friend who owned a food truck and in various bars.

"I had the original idea of opening a food truck, then I went to a wedding and just had really mediocre drinks," said Johnston, the co-owner alongside his mother, Mary, of The Thirsty Filly, which is a mobile bar business based in Ashtabula County that serves the Akron, Canton, Cleveland and Geneva areas.

Johnston felt that weddings in Northeast Ohio were lacking the craft cocktail, higher-end bar service experience. It was then that The Thirsty Filly started with an

early 1970s horse trailer. The business has now grown into an additional early 1970s horse trailer and a 1966 classic cocktail and beer tap truck.

"We got the idea, being in Ashtabula County, we're surrounded by the rustic, bohemian theme," Johnston said. "We had started the transformation in 2019 and 2020 was our first year in business."

In this industry, there is not a mobile bar for dummies guide or contractors who have done something like this, Johnston said. With a goal of having a mobile bar business that will be unique and fit in all settings, Johnston and his mother spent a lot of time fabricating it into the way they wanted it.

"It's a trailer, so finding ways to fabricate something that's always driving down bumpy roads, dealing with all conditions — weather, rain, heat. It was a fun experience for the first few weeks and then it became work," Johnston said.

The Thirsty Filly's clientele are primarily people booking the mobile bar service for weddings and events. The Thirsty Filly also partakes in corporate events, back-



PHOTO BY MARAH MORRISON

Gregory Johnston, co-owner of The Thirsty Filly, and his mother, Mary, co-owner, have put their heart and soul into their mobile bar business that started in 2019 with an early 1970s horse trailer.

SEE PAGE 6 >

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¹Sharpe, Rochelle. (2019, September 12). *Untreated Hearing Loss Linked To Loneliness And Isolation For Seniors*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/09/12/760231279/untreated-hearing-loss-linked-to-loneliness-and-isolation-for-seniors> | ©2021 Starkey Laboratories, Inc. All Rights Reserved. 6/21 696621758 | Via a registered trademark of Starkey Laboratories, Inc.

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Ashtabula County Covered Bridge Festival will be celebrating its 37th Annual Festival to be held October 9th and 10th, located on East Jefferson Street from Chestnut Street going East to the Railroad tracks.



The port of the Historic Ashtabula Harbor is has a robust food scene that is home to chef-inspired and award winning restaurants such as Briquettes Smokehouse, Rennicks Meat Market, Bascule Bridge Grille, and the 50-year veteran anchor on the block, Hil-Mak Seafood. Retail businesses including Harbor Perk Coffee House, Carlisle's Home in the Harbor, Bridge Street Art Works, and several other boutiques, giving visitors and regulars alike a year round shopping opportunity.

The Ashtabula Harbor has evolved into a popular regional recreation, entertainment and tourism destination for both locals and visitors, with attractions such as several adjacent parks and beaches, multiple marinas and museums, kayaking and canoeing along the river, and a walking tours of the historic buildings lining Bridge Street.

Visit www.historicashtabulaharbor.com for more information on this unique area of Ashtabula County.

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THE THIRSTY FILLY FROM PAGE 2

yard parties and nonprofit events.

"The majority of our business are weddings," Johnston said. "Ashtabula County is always interesting because we reside here, but we don't do a ton of work out here. It could be because there aren't a ton of wedding venues."

Not only do Johnston, his mother and the 12 employed strive to provide a craft cocktail experience for clients, those clients are worked with closely one on one.

"We, by law, cannot purchase or re-sell alcohol. Our client purchases the alcohol directly from our liquor representative, so we help the client with ordering quantities and making sure that while we're on the premises that we have the supply to perform our craft," Johnston said.

Clients are provided with a variety of options from putting beer on tap with the tap truck or choosing from a wide selection of craft cocktails. Johnston is finding that the majority of clients are looking for a finer craft cocktail and a unique menu for their event versus a traditional bar service with the "same old wedding drinks."

"We are giving all of our clients fresh ingredients, and we work well with a lot of barn venues, and really any outdoor space. We've been in Cleveland on the side of the road, but we work well with those places where it's a blank canvas," Johnston said. "We provide the aesthetics and craft cocktails. We bring the bar, we're there and then we leave. We've worked with a few venues that have bars already. We also will run their bars as well on top of ours at the venue, so sometimes we run two bars."

Although he doesn't refer himself as a mixologist, Johnston tries to create a different menu for every season.

"We do have a few nationally published cocktails that are staples," Johnston said. "A lot of our clients who've booked with us call us back saying, 'We want you for a 50th birthday party and we want that blackberry orange bourbon.' We create that excitement and these people remember the cocktails. People will book with us and they're like, 'I don't know a ton, but I did have that blueberry lemon-cured gin fizz. I know I want that.' It's an experience from the first phone call."

The Thirsty Filly's bookings will be right around 136 events this year. Next year, the business is currently looking at

102 bookings. The Thirsty Filly books with wedding clients anywhere from 15 to 18 months in advance. A lot of its corporate business will receive emails at the beginning of the year and they will fill in blank dates.

"We do last-minute stuff if we can," Johnston said. "We do seven to nine events a weekend on average, so logistically, we book accordingly if we have a huge event. Running a third bar is not likely because we have a small staff. For a normal event, we can service up to 350 guests. We leave it to our client. If they want more than one mobile bar, great. We always staff our event based on the guests. If you're having a 250-guest wedding, the tap truck can handle it. We can serve 280 every six minutes with the truck."

Nationwide, there is a mobile bar community present, Johnston said. When he first started, there were only three mobile bar services in Northeast Ohio. Now, there are more.

"Everyone has their own niche. I would like to think all of us are in our own lane. People see the value in it, and it's growing every day," Johnston said.

Johnston did not anticipate the number of events the business ended up doing during its second year, as well as adding two more bars to the fleet. The Thirsty Filly was a part-time thing that has grown, he said.

"It's easy to forget about the experiences we create because we are always moving," Johnston said. "We go to an event, knock it out, go home, load up and do it again. The majority of our business is working with people on the most important day of their life, so making sure those days run seamlessly and they're getting a high-end service is important."

"It's a good reminder when we get those emails or a five-star review."

Johnston is focusing on growing the business, as well as growing the mobile bar fleet and bringing on new employees to free up time for him and his mother to expand.

"There is potential for opening a brick and mortar with craft cocktails and beer in Ashtabula County. That could happen in the next two years," Johnston said. "We put our heart and soul into this and we love it."

Get information on booking with The Thirsty Filly thethirstyfilly.com.

Enjoy a Fall Driving Tour of the Covered Bridges of Ashtabula County



1. NETCHER

1544 Netcher Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 14' 6" (2.7 mi. from center of Jefferson)

The bridge over Mill Creek and was opened to traffic in 1999. It features a timber arch with inverted Haupt trusses. The "Neo Victorian" designed structure is 110' Long, 22' Wide, and 14' 6" High.

2. SOUTH DENMARK

2670 South Denmark Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 9'0" (2.7 mi. from Netcher Rd Bridge)

Built in 1890 this Town Lattice bridge spans Mill Creek. The 81-foot-long structure was bypassed in 1975.

3. CAINE

4699 Caine Rd, Pierpont Township

Clearance 11'0" (6.7 mi. from S Denmark Rd Bridge)

This first Pratt Truss bridge in Ohio was built in 1986 in honor of the County's 175th anniversary. The 124-foot-long bridge traverses the west branch of the Ashtabula River.

4. GRAHAM

4646 Graham Rd, Pierpont Township

Bypass (5.9 mi. from Caine Rd Bridge)

Built from remnants of a bridge washed downstream in the 1913 flood, the bridge now sits in a small park on the south side of the road.

5. ROOT

4680 Root Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 8'4" (3.9 mi. from Graham Rd Bridge)

A 114-foot-long Town Lattice built in 1868, Root Rd Bridge was raised 18" during the rehabilitation in 1982-83. New laminated girders and a center concrete pier were also added.

6. MIDDLE

910 Middle Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 13'6" (8.3 mi. from Root Rd Bridge)

This 136-foot-long Howe Truss bridge was built in 1868 over Conneaut Creek, which is a favorite Steelhead Stream. It was rehabilitated in 1984 with the help of 7 volunteers.

7. STATE

5899 State Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 16'2" (5.1 miles from Middle Rd Bridge)

Containing 97,000' of southern pine and oak, the State Rd Bridge was erected in 1983 across Conneaut Creek. This 152-foot-long Town Lattice was the first covered bridge designed and built by County Engineer, John W. Smolen, Jr. A 4' opening spans the length.

8. CREEK

371 Creek Rd, Conneaut

Clearance 11'4" (3.4 mi. from State Rd Bridge)

The construction date of this 125-foot-long Town Lattice is unknown. It sits 25' above Conneaut Creek and was renovated in 1994.

9. BENETKA

4500 Benetka Rd, Sheffield Township

Clearance 11'0" (11.5 mi. from Creek Rd Bridge)

A 138-foot-long Town Lattice with arch bridge, Benetka was built about 1900. It was renovated in 1985 when a laminated arch 9 in. wide, 38 in. thick, spanning the length of the bridge, was added.

10. OLIN

1880 Dewey Rd, Plymouth Township

Clearance 12'0" (2.5 mi. from Benetka Rd Bridge)

Olins' have owned property next to the bridge since it was built in 1873. The 115-foot-long Town Lattice structure over the Ashtabula River was renovated in 1985.

11. SMOLEN-GULF

7001 State Rd, Ashtabula

Clearance 14'6" (2.6 mi. from Olins Bridge) The longest covered bridge in the U.S. is of Pratt Truss construction.

Engineering and structural design was done by John W. Smolen, Jr. (former county engineer) and architectural design was done by Timothy J. Martin (current county engineer). Dedicated in 2008, it is 613' long and stands 93' above the River. With a clear width of 30', it will support full legal-load traffic and has a life expectancy of 100 years.

12. RIVERVIEW

Indian Trails Park, 4761 State Road, Ashtabula

This bridge is 150' long and 14' wide, making it one of the larger bridges, yet it carries only pedestrian traffic. It mirrors the Pratt arch design of its big brother, Smolen-Gulf, which rises above. Both cross the Ashtabula River at Indian Trails Park. Riverview, dedicated in 2016, provides exercise trails and a place to enjoy the beautiful river scenery.

13. GIDDINGS

1400 Giddings Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 15'6" (8 mi. from Smolen-Gulf Bridge)

Pratt Truss construction was used for this 107-foot-long bridge built in 1995. It crosses Mill Creek in Jefferson Township. At this point the tour returns to Jefferson (3.5 miles back) via Jones Road, Rt. 167 and Rt. 46.

14. DOYLE

1300 Doyle Rd, Jefferson

Clearance 13' 6" (1.8 mi. from Jefferson)

A 94-foot-long Town Lattice bridge built in 1868, Doyle spans Mill Creek, a tributary of the Grand River. This bridge was renovated in 1987 when a laminated arch was added.

15. WEST LIBERTY

94 West Liberty St, Geneva

Clearance 15' (10.6 mi. from Doyle Rd Bridge)

The shortest covered bridge in the U.S., Liberty spans only 18'. The structure is supported by a single Kingpost and its roof is a Scissor Truss which gives the bridge a light, open feeling. Timber for this bridge was harvested from county land owners. The bridge was modularly constructed by students of Ashtabula County Joint Vocational School (now A-Tech).

16. HARPERSFIELD

1122 Harpersfield Rd, Geneva

Clearance 10'9" (3 mi. from Liberty St. Bridge)

This two-span Howe Truss bridge is 228' long and is the second longest bridge in Ohio. Built in 1868, it is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A 1913 flood altered the river, requiring a steel bridge to link the covered bridge to the north approach. A walkway was added in 1992.

17. MECHANICSVILLE

1153 Mechanicsville Rd, Geneva

Clearance 10' (4.6 mi. from Harpersfield Bridge)

Longest single-span covered bridge in Ashtabula, this 156' long Howe Truss with Arch was built in 1867. The arch is 15 layers of 2x8 lumber and is encased by large beams which form the X's of the Howe Truss. Believed to be the oldest of the County's bridges, it was renovated in 2003.

18. RIVERDALE

3349 Riverdale Rd, Rock Creek

Clearance 9'6" (9.2 mi. from Mechanicsville Bridge)

This 114-foot-long Town Lattice bridge sits high above the Grand River. Center steel bracing was added in 1945, and in 1981, the floor was rebuilt and glue laminated girders added to the interior. This creates a bridge-within-a-bridge and narrows the passageway. The Rd at the east end of the bridge washed out in 1987 and a new concrete abutment was built.

19. WINDSOR MILLS

7696 Warner Hollow Rd, Windsor

Clearance 11'3" (14.5 mi. from Riverdale Bridge)

Windsor Mills is 120' long and spans Phelps Creek, a tributary of the Grand River. Built in 1867 the Town Lattice bridge rests on abutments of sandstone (quarried nearby) and creek stone. The field stone center pier was replaced with stone-look concrete when it was renovated in 2002-03.

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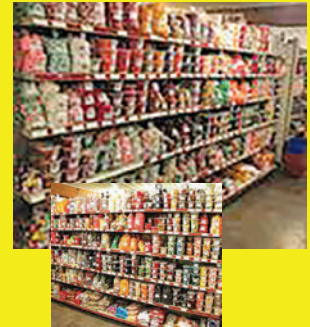
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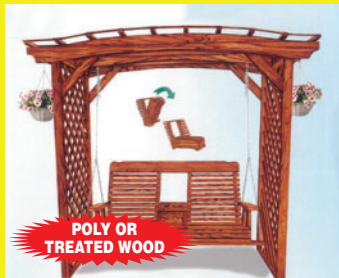
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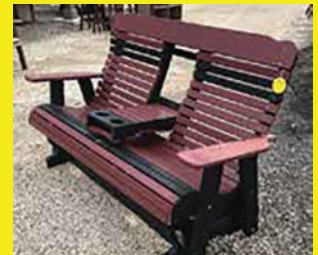
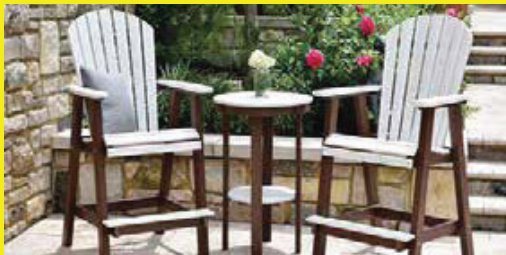


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