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May is Tavern Month: Celebrating 250 Years of American Community, From Founding Taverns to Today's Gathering Places

BETHESDA, MD – As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of its founding, American Beverage Licensees (ABL) is marking Tavern Month this May by honoring the historic and ongoing role of bars and taverns as essential gathering places at the heart of American life.

“From the earliest days of the Republic, taverns have been woven into the fabric of American life,” said John Bodnovich, Executive Director of American Beverage Licensees. “They were there at the founding, hosting debate, fostering community, and shaping civic engagement. They continue to play that same role today in towns and neighborhoods across the country.”

In the years leading up to American independence, colonists gathered in taverns to exchange news, organize, and give voice to the principles that would define the United States. From those colonial meeting houses to frontier saloons, taverns have been part of the American story wherever it has gone. As the nation expanded, taverns and saloons were often among the first establishments to open in new towns, serving as gathering places for travelers, workers, and families alike.

From Main Streets to city neighborhoods, taverns and bars have remained vital community anchors welcoming returning soldiers, celebrating milestones, supporting local causes, and providing a space where people from all walks of life can come together.

Today, that role is more important than ever.

At a time when Americans are spending more time alone by working remotely, or are replacing human contact with social media, local bars and taverns remain some of the few places where people regularly connect face-to-face, coming together with neighbors, supporting local small businesses, and strengthening the social fabric of communities.

“In an era of working-from-home, digital interaction, and increased isolation, bars and taverns offer something uniquely valuable: real human connection,” Bodnovich said. “They are places where neighbors become friends, where conversations happen naturally, and where community still thrives.”

However, these longstanding institutions face mounting challenges. ABL continues to emphasize the importance of public policies that recognize both the economic and civic contributions of taverns and bars. Key issues impacting on-premise retailers include escalating credit card swipe fees, increasing liability insurance rates, workforce pressures and rising costs, and efforts to disrupt effective beverage alcohol regulatory structures.

“As we reflect on 250 years of American history, policymakers should recognize that taverns are institutions that have helped sustain American community life since the beginning,” Bodnovich added. “Ensuring their future requires thoughtful, balanced policies that allow them to continue serving that role for generations to come.”

During Tavern Month, ABL encourages Americans to support their local bars and taverns and take part in the longstanding tradition of gathering in shared spaces. As we celebrate America’s 250th birthday, let’s also celebrate the enduring importance of coming together, and the places that make that possible.

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American Beverage Licensees (ABL)

American Beverage Licensees is the preeminent national trade association for beverage alcohol retailers. Direct retail beverage alcohol sales in the United States generate more than 2.03 million well-paying jobs. ABL’s thousands of on-premise and off-premise licensee members are independent and often family-owned establishments. The beverage retailing industry pays over \$27.9 billion in federal taxes and \$25.8 billion in state and local taxes annually.

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