

# Sun News Kanab, UT

Ty Gant Mar 29, 2023

## Historic Buckskin Tavern on the way to reopening

When Milt Cram first built the Buckskin Tavern on the Utah/Arizona border in 1934, he was catering to cowboys and local ranchfolk - a humble beginning, but ultimately a profitable one, especially when the Little Hollywood movie making boom hit the area in earnest. Considering how notoriously difficult it was to get a drink in Utah then - many say that it still is now - the Buckskin being right across the border made it a popular watering hole for many of the travelers, visitors and movie makers that were visiting Kanab and Fredonia. The tavern grew bit by bit, adding the dance hall and stage section in the sixties, and new wings of seating since.



The new ownership and management team left to right: Lianne Kelly, Chris Kelly and Grace Hrabak. Photo by Ty Gant.

The Buckskin served the area for years, until the economic shock that hit the country along with COVID-19 a few years ago - like many businesses that rely on regular waves of in-person patronage, the old tavern lost almost the entirety of its clientele. The Buckskin would shut down during the pandemic, and it's not easy to get a place like that reopened once the revenue stops and the clientele have lost the habit of coming in.

Cue 2023, and the entrance of Lianne and Chris Kelly. Lianne says, "I've always wanted a tap house, and I wanted to contribute to the community. I looked at this local community and thought, 'what does it need? What do I have to offer?' and I settled on a gathering place. Not necessarily a hard drinking place, but just a place to play pool, dance and listen to music ... a place to come together." So with that goal in mind the Kellys bought the old Buckskin tavern and started dusting the old place off.

When asked what makes the Buckskin special, Lianne responded, "Honestly, it's the stories ... When we were talking to people about it and considering buying the place, every single person we spoke to had a story about something that happened in the old Buckskin Tavern. The Buckskin has a special place in the community."

The new owners have big plans to bring the Buckskin back to life. "It was a rowdier crowd back then than we'll likely be serving now," says Lianne. "We're not serving hard liquor and we won't be open till all hours of the morning - we're making sure the place has something for everyone, rather than a place just specifically for the hard drinking crowd." To make that a reality, the owners are planning on quite a bit of expansion to the Buckskin's menu as the opening progresses, including opening early morning and serving coffee, adding tavern food and even bringing back regular live entertainment. "Our goal is a live band every Saturday evening, and local singers and guitar players when we can get them on the weeknights." Chris explained. "Arizona regulations means we don't have to serve food with every drink," Lianne elaborated on the food portion, "but we're gonna have tavern food to make sure you're not starving when you're here dancing and shooting pool - like I said, something for everybody! If you just want to grab a beer, great, but eventually we'll have food separate from the drinks."

Assistant Manager Grace Hrabak helped to elaborate on exactly what the plans were for the grabbing-a-beer portion of the business plan: "I love working here. I have a brewery background, I worked at a brewery for three years before coming here. Not dealing with hard liquors means I can get back to my roots and focus on what I like." In addition to the standard beer options, the tavern will have a dozen - and counting - local craft beers. "We're here in Arizona, so we want to feature and highlight Arizona wherever we can," said Lianne.

When asked for the highlights of working there so far, both Kelly and Hrabak responded, "the small town atmosphere." Lianne continued, "this place definitely has a certain feel to it that we're looking to keep - the old cowboy feel, with the woodwork and the cowprint patterns and everything." For a specific example of when the tavern really started to feel like it was coming back to life, Lianne said, "when we finally got the sound system set up. We started playing music in here and it really started to feel real."

With processes like the liquor license transfer already underway, the Buckskin Tavern is hoping to re-open in the middle of April, with the expansions mentioned above to be integrated bit by bit over the course of the year.