

HOT SPOT

BY BART BEESON

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BOARDROOM



Fun and Games at **The Boardroom Cafe in Burlington**

Parcheesi, anyone?

For many people, playing board games brings back memories of their youth—the colorful board of Candy Land, the fake money and metal pieces of Monopoly, the complex plastic contraption of Mouse Trap. And while those games are still popular, there's a whole world of board games most people don't know about, with more coming out every day. At Vermont's first board game cafe, The Boardroom, customers can choose from nearly 700 different games, both old and new. Having



Opposite from top: The Black & Blue grilled cheese is just one of the decadent sandwiches. A perfect starter is a pickle plate with dill, horseradish, and spicy pickle chips. You probably won't find a better brunch staple in Burlington than the Big Awesome Sandwich. The sign hangs on the recently renovated historic building.

Above: In addition to the extensive game library, The Boardroom has a retail section where customers can buy or special order their favorite games.

Left: Owner Kerry Winger.

to pick from so many might seem overwhelming to some, but co-owner Kerry Winger says, “We tend to offer suggestions to people. We might ask you to name some games that you like and we help people cross over to the modern style of gaming. And then in reverse, for people who have only played modern games, we try to bring them back to the classics.”

MAKING SPACE FOR GAMES

Kerry and her husband Mark opened The Boardroom in November of 2019, after finding a space on Burlington’s Mill Street, just across the river from downtown Winooski. Kerry relates that after visiting similar cafes in other cities, she had a clear vision of what she wanted in her own game



Above: Customers play the game *Pocket Aviary*, a game by local developers Concept Medley. Right: Donnie Coleman of Concept Medley teaches *Version Conflict*, a two-player legacy fighting game.

Opposite: The giant 10-inch pretzel served with cheese sauce is everyone's favorite go-to gaming snack.

cafe. First, she wanted to make sure that she hired wait staff who played a lot of games, so that they could teach customers how to play. She also wanted to make sure that people had enough room for their food and their games, and not be squeezed into a table for two. And she wanted customers to be able to get up and browse the games themselves, without having to request a specific game from a staff member. Finally, Kerry felt it was important that they didn't charge by the hour, so that people could play as long as they want.

"We have people who come in as soon as we open at noon on Saturday and stay until we close—they eat all day, they have something to drink, they play four or five games, and it's their monthly get together with their friends," she says. (The Boardroom charges a \$6 per person table fee to play games and offers monthly and yearly passes.)





A ROUSING SUCCESS

After opening, Kerry was surprised at the enthusiastic community response. "When we initially opened, people in the community reached out to me and started donating games to us," she says. They quickly developed regulars, who would come in three or four times a week. Additionally, as board games can be expensive, many customers would come in to try a game to see if they liked it enough to purchase it for themselves. Kerry adds that one of her favorite parts of the job was seeing parents come in and teach games they had when they were young to their own children.

They soon started offering group games like Dungeons and Dragons (with staff members serving as Dungeon Master), workshops, trivia nights, and other events. Unfortunately, after being open only a few months, The Boardroom had to close due to COVID-19. They reopened in mid-August (much to their customers' delight) with new safety protocols in place such as having fewer tables to allow for social distancing and sanitizing each game after being used.

CLASSIC GAME

After talking to Kerry on the phone, I decided I had to visit in person, so on a rainy Tuesday evening my friend and I headed to the cafe to play some games. We were greeted by a friendly host who explained how the place works and offered suggestions about which game we should play based on some of our favorites. The cafe is set on two floors and feels both open and cozy at the same time, with the upper level overlooking the downstairs area. Games line all the walls and



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Above: Customers test their knowledge with a classic game of Trivial Pursuit.

Right: Pass the Pigs is even better when played with giant foam pigs.

Opposite: The homemade bagel bites will bring you right back to middle school. The Rachel, a Ruben with pastrami or turkey is served with a pile of chips and is a Boardroom favorite.

are color coded with stickers depending on their degree of difficulty (our host told us that they have one game that can take about 10 hours to play, and that's if you know what you're doing). On Kerry's recommendation we decided to play Parcheesi (like Sorry! but more strategic, she tells us). After a quick review of the rules with our host, we settled in at an upstairs table and moved our pieces around the board while enjoying a couple of cold IPAs. The cafe menu can only be described as comfort food, featuring a variety of PB&Js, grinders, milkshakes, and grilled cheeses—we chose two of the latter for our dinner.

NO WI-FI ALLOWED

While it was a quiet evening at the cafe, it was easy to imagine it buzzing with groups of people laughing and talking strategy while immersed in their respective games. There's



a small sign on the wall that says "No Wi-Fi, Play Boardgames, Talk to Each Other." Says Kerry, "It's really about bringing people together. Most people who come here and hang out don't even look at their phones because it's not about that." We spent an enjoyable hour



at the cafe, and as we were leaving I couldn't help thinking how, as things eventually return to normal, we could use more places like this that bring people together.

The Boardroom - Board Game Cafe

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www.theboardroomvt.com

ONLINE EXTRA



Find Kelly's top game picks
at www.bestofburlingtonvt.com.

An advertisement for Church Hill Landscapes. It includes a logo with the letters 'CH' in gold, a photograph of a paved patio with outdoor furniture, and two smaller images: one showing yellow flowers and another showing a man and a child at a campfire. Text on the left says 'ENRICH THE LIFE YOU LIVE OUTDOORS'.



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