



## Restaurants

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# The Barkeep's Barkeep

Ray Foley's recipe for success runs from punch to punch lines.

Posted October 15, 2009 by [Mary Ann Castronovo Fusco](#)

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Illustration by James Yang.

You can call him Ray, you can call him barkeep. Just don't call Basking Ridge resident Ray Foley—author of *Bartending for Dummies* and more than a dozen other bartending books—a mixologist.

"Those who call themselves mixologists are phonies," declares the South Orange native, who co-created the fuzzy navel for DeKuyper (1.5 oz. DeKuyper Peachtree Schnapps, 2 oz. orange juice) in 1985. "A mixologist is a person who really doesn't know how to tend bar but has enough money to get a PR agent."

Snappy one-liners come easily to the 66-year-old former Marine and veteran bartender who once wrote jokes for Totie Fields, Phyllis Diller, and Johnny Carson. But he takes what he calls "the on-premise pouring profession" seriously, and has gained a national following with *Bartender* magazine, which he founded 30 years ago while working at the Manor in West Orange. Today the quarterly has a circulation of almost 150,000 and a companion web site, [bartender.com](#).

"When I first started, I didn't know the difference between a martini and a Manhattan," Foley admits. "In the service, I drank shots and beer." Nonetheless, in the late '60s, he landed a part-time job at the Manor's service bar, where waiters filled drink orders and "you had to be fast, but you couldn't be sloppy." He soon mastered enough cocktails to work the front bar and eventually became beverage manager and assistant general manager, as well as a consultant to distillers and importers.

After two decades, Foley left the Manor to focus on the publishing company he and his wife, Jaclyn, also a Manor alum, run from their home. The Foleys created the Bartender Hall of Fame and run a foundation to provide scholarships for bartenders and their kids. In addition to his many cocktail volumes (and a 2009 desk calendar called *Beer Is the Answer... I Don't Remember the Question*), Foley has compiled a few joke books, including this year's *God Loves Golfers Best* (containing such gems as, "The difference between golf and government is that in golf you can't improve your lie," attributed to former California governor George Deukmejian). He has collected 1,500 cocktail recipe books, some dating to the 1800s, and 368 cocktail shakers, including one made from an artillery shell.

"Being a good bartender is 20 percent mechanics and 80 percent personality," he says. "You've got to like people. You're dealing with people at the best parts of their life—birthdays, weddings, anniversaries—and the worst parts—divorce, death." He thinks every bar should have a signature drink as long as it abides by a cardinal rule: Keep it simple. "Creating a drink with mango juice and lemongrass isn't going to impress my fat Irish ass, because I want to see them sold," he says.

True to his Irish roots—his father was from Limerick; his mother, Tipperary—the affable raconteur can pour on the charm as readily as his favorite Stinger—made with Armagnac, not cognac, please. (You have to love a guy who ends almost every conversation with, "You're the best!") Having served a constellation of celebrities in his day—from Alan King to Jackie O—he abides by the bartender's code of honor: What's said at the bar, stays at the bar. (Though he will tell you professional athletes are the worst tippers, because fans pay their tabs and owners comp them, so they claim to "never see the bill.")

Come January, Foley, a father of four, will become a grandfather, though he isn't crazy about being called Grandpa. Still, it beats mixologist.

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