

Let the Good Times Roll

WORDS: SHARON MORTON

Mobile Bartending Services Deliver

IMAGINE IF YOUR favorite bar rolled into your cousin's wedding reception.

That's a bit of what it feels like to walk up to a bar provided by a mobile bartending service. Often pouring craft beers and signature cocktails from retro-inspired or vintage trailers, these services are becoming a more frequent sight in Southeast Michigan.

Instead of the usual standard mixed drinks, limited wines and mass-market beers, mobile bartending companies aim to use local brands and ingredients whenever possible. Their signature cocktails rival those of the fanciest brick-and-mortar establishments.

Though the pandemic also played a role, forcing people to rethink traditional ways of hosting large gatherings, the growing fleet of mobile bartending businesses is being driven by a desire for events with a more personalized touch, according to the owners.

An entrepreneurial spirit tends to power these businesses, which focus on weddings, high-end corporate clients, backyard parties and everything in between. Although many serve guests from charming custom vehicles, most if not all can accommodate snuggler settings with stationary bars.

And, of course, there are the beverages. This is where each company's creativity really shines through. Want a one-of-a-kind signature cocktail? How about a drink specifically concocted for your event? Multiple self-serve beer taps? Mocktails? Coffee bar? You can get all of this and more.

One thing that is consistent among the businesses is the State of Michigan liquor laws. Mobile bartending services can only serve liquor purchased by their clients, not purchase it directly. The services typically help customers develop a shopping list. Some will direct you to a supplier and even pick up the liquor after your purchase.

Here's a look at three mobile bartending services rolling into parties and events throughout Metro Detroit.

PHOTO BY JESSICA JENKINS,
COPPER TWIG COLLECTIVE





PHOTO BY KATHY SULLIVAN

Sidecar Bartending

SIDECAR BARTENDING calls itself a Made-in-Michigan beverage experience.

Owner Kathy Sullivan started her Detroit-area mobile bartending business in 2015 when she recognized an opportunity to shake up the market by providing on-site high-end cocktails prepared by professional bartenders.

An “aha” moment came about a year into the business, when Sullivan worked an event with food trucks.

“I realized I needed my own version of a food truck,” she says. That idea became the Sidecar Pony Bar, a specially outfitted horse trailer that travels to events to serve up drinks, the first of its kind in the area.

Today, Sidecar can be found at a variety of events including weddings, bar mitzvahs, birthday parties, grand openings and pop-up corporate happy hours. At all of them, the common thread is Sidecar’s commitment to unique beverages crafted with local ingredients and served sustainably, such as using straws made from corn, out of a cup made in Detroit from recycled plastic.

PHOTO BY JESSICA JENKINS, COPPER TWIG COLLECTIVE



Miss Mixology

LINDSAY GOFF started one of the early mobile bartending services in the region when her business, Miss Mixology, launched in 2014.

Today, her team is frequently booked for weddings. “I love, love them. It is my favorite thing to be a part of,” says Goff.

Outdoor receptions sometimes feature “The Roaming Spirit,” her restored vintage camper bar.

Miss Mixology favors Michigan craft breweries and distilleries, recommending them for beverage menus for clients and including their spirits in signature cocktails. Much of their produce comes from Eastern Market.

Their most popular signature cocktail is the Summer Berry Spritzer, which uses in-season berries and mint from the market. A fall favorite, the Cinnamon Apple Margarita, gets its sparkle from a Michigan favorite, Armada-based Blake’s Apple Cider.

Along with their own signature cocktails, the team at Miss Mixology loves to develop the perfect unique cocktail for an event. For a recent wedding, Goff designed an “edible cocktail topper,” which had a drawing of the bride’s dog on edible paper.

For clients that don’t want to hire bartenders, Miss Mixology also sells “batch cocktails.” These DIY beverage mixes can be mixed with alcohol onsite and served.

MISS MIXOLOGY’S SUMMER BERRY SPRITZER

FOR THE SYRUP:

- 10 ounces mixed berries (fresh or frozen)
- Sugar
- Water

FOR THE COCKTAIL:

- 2 ounces vodka
- 1½ ounces wild berry syrup
- 7UP
- Berry skewer and mint sprig (for garnish)

FOR THE WILD BERRY SYRUP:

In a small pot, combine mixed berries with equal parts sugar and water over medium heat. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and let sit for 20 minutes. It is done once the liquid is dark purple and the berries are soft. Strain the berries from the simple syrup with a mesh strainer. Press down on the berries to get extra flavor. Refrigerate until cold.

FOR THE COCKTAIL:

In a shaker, add vodka and wild berry syrup and shake vigorously. Strain over ice and top with 7UP. Garnish with a berry skewer and mint sprig.

“We offer our own specialty cocktails and we also work with our customers to create a custom drink that ties into their theme,” says Sullivan.

Their paloma cocktail features sparkling water from Rochester-based Käter Wingman, as well as grapefruit juice or sparkling water, tequila and fresh lime juice.

The “Made in Michigan” tagline reflects their use of beverages from Michigan-based distilleries and breweries, as well as locally grown ingredients for their syrups, fresh juices and garnishes.

You can buy Sidecar’s “infusions in a jar” to create your own beverage flavorings, like Hibiscus Honey or Jalapeño Margarita. Future plans include a “Tiki Bar Takeover” package and a “Cocktails in a Keg” service.

SIDECAR BARTENDING’S PORCH PALOMA RECIPE

*The perfect balance of
salty, sweet and sour.*

- 2 ounces (60 ml) fresh grapefruit juice
- ½ ounce (30 ml) fresh lime juice
- 2 ounces (60 ml) tequila
- 4 ounces (120 ml) sparkling water or grapefruit soda
- Grapefruit wedge to garnish
- Paloma rim spice to rim glass (optional)

FOR PALOMA RIM SPICE:

- 2 tablespoons (28.3 g) kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons (28.3 g) sugar
- 2 tablespoons (28.3 g) chili powder

Sprinkle rim spice (if using) in a saucer and press the moist rim of the glass into it to coat. Combine grapefruit juice, lime juice and tequila. Add ice, and top off with your favorite grapefruit soda or sparkling water. Garnish with a grapefruit wedge.

Byrdie Bar ●●●●●

BYRDIE BAR was a silver lining to the black cloud that was COVID.

Its founder, Kristine Mannino, was laid off from her Detroit bartending job when that business closed permanently due to the pandemic. Soon after, Mannino talked to a friend who was planning a wedding in Denver.

“She mentioned they were looking at a mobile bar,” Mannino remembers. “I started researching it and realized it would be a great business here.”

Mannino outlined her dream mobile bar in blue painter’s tape on her living room floor. In January 2021, it became a reality.

Since then, Byrdie Bar has served unique, custom beverages at events—some for individuals and families celebrating milestones, others for larger groups and events—throughout Southeast Michigan. One significant partnership came with the Detroit Zoo for its After Hours 21+ Event Series,



PHOTO BY
BRIAN KOVACH





PHOTO BY KRISTINE MANNINO



which invites adults to stroll the grounds while enjoying grownup beverages.

The Byrdie Bar fleet includes a vintage Ford van with six taps. “We use it for craft beers, but also cocktails and even iced coffees and lemonade,” says Mannino.

They offer a wide range of specialty cocktails and Mannino’s team loves to develop a drink with a “fun twist” to suit a client. They also advocate using local brands, products and ingredients.

A customer favorite is their Lavender Lemon Fizz. The lavender comes from a farm in Romeo and the unique neon purple color is a result of the butterfly pea powder used.

“I always tell people you can go anywhere and get a vodka soda or a Bud Light,” says Mannino. “If you do a drink and put a little twist on it, people get really excited when they come up to the bar. People just go crazy for it.”

A FEW SUGGESTIONS WHEN HIRING A MOBILE BARTENDING SERVICE:

Book early. Those cute vintage vehicles get reserved far in advance.

Compare services. Some mobile bartending services offer overall coordination of an event, including providing staff to set up, serve and clear tables.

Compare prices. Different services mean different rates.

Check insurance. A reputable company will have insurance in the event of a mishap.

Ask about bartenders. Make sure the staff will be trained bartenders.

Measure. If a bar on wheels is involved, be sure to check that it isn’t too big to get into your space.

Ask about liquor purchases. Find out how each company advises and supports liquor purchases.

Don’t skimp on service. Going with one less bartender might sound like a savings but a long line for drinks could spoil the fun.

Don’t be afraid to ask questions. A lot of creativity goes into hosting a great event. Understand your options for specialty drinks, serving ware, decorations and other details that are important to you.

BYRDIE BAR’S SIGNATURE LAVENDER LEMON FIZZ

FOR THE COCKTAIL:

- 1½ ounces vodka
- 1 ounce lavender syrup
- 1 ounce lemon juice
- Ice
- Club soda
- Sprig of lavender

FOR THE LAVENDER SYRUP:

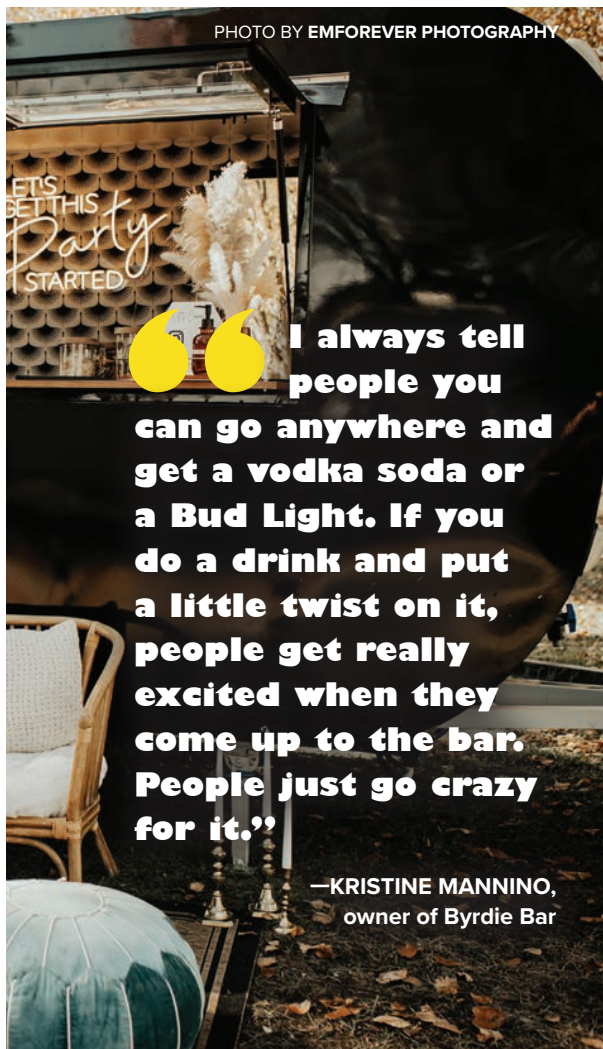
- Sugar
- Water
- Butterfly pea flower powder
- Food-grade dried lavender

Combine equal parts sugar and water in a pan and simmer until it is an even consistency and the sugar is dissolved completely. Stir in butterfly pea flower powder to get a dark blue color. The mixture will be dark blue until the lemon hits the syrup, creating a lavender color. Add food-grade dried lavender to the mixture and let it soak until desired strength of flavor.

FOR THE COCKTAIL:

Combine vodka, lavender syrup and lemon juice in a shaker. Shake with ice. Pour mixture into a glass with ice and top with club soda. Garnish with a sprig of lavender.

PHOTO BY EMFOREVER PHOTOGRAPHY



“I always tell people you can go anywhere and get a vodka soda or a Bud Light. If you do a drink and put a little twist on it, people get really excited when they come up to the bar. People just go crazy for it.”

—KRISTINE MANNINO, owner of Byrdie Bar

Miss Mixology (based in Shelby Twp.), 248-941-4026, missmixologymichigan.com

Sidecar Bartending (based in Birmingham), 248-703-8865, sidecarbartending.com

Byrdie Bar (based in Berkley), byrdiebar.com

Sharon Morton is a feature and business writer working in Metro Detroit.