## Sun Chronicle

## Blog highlights year-round restaurants in Old Orchard Beach



## **LEAH KALIHER**

LEAH KALIHER, a student at Endicott College and a resident of Old Orchard Beach, has started a new blog featuring the year-round restaurants in town. (Photo by Myra Dettelbach)

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By Kate Irish Collins Staff writer

OLD ORCHARD BEACH – What started out as a class project has taken on a life of its own and blogger and college student Leah Kaliher plans on keeping her postings about year-round restaurants in Old Orchard Beach and what makes them successful updated even after her course ends later this month.

 $\hbox{ Called a "Year-Round Taste of OOB," Kaliher's blog can be found at $\underline{\tt www.oobrestaurants.blogspot.com}. } \\$ 

She describes the purpose behind the blog, which includes pod casts and video footage, as follows: "Old Orchard Beach, Maine is a small town that attracts thousands of tourists from New England and Canada during the summer months. After Labor Day, many of the town's businesses, including several restaurants and other food services, shut down. A select few of these businesses choose to stay open, continuing to serve the public in the off-season. This blog will take you through an exploration of these unique restaurants that continue to draw in customers once all the tourists have gone."

This week Kaliher, who grew up in Old Orchard Beach and is now a sophomore at Endicott College in Massachusetts, said the restaurant blog was a requirement of her digital journalism class.

In addition to interviewing restaurant owners about their choice to stay open year-round and the techniques they use to bring in customers, Kaliher's blog also asks locals to call her and leave a message identifying their favorite Old Orchard Beach restaurant and any memories associated with those places. She also hopes that people will tell her what it means to them to have local restaurants stay open year-round.

Kaliher said since the blog was first posted "it's gotten a lot of views" and the local response has "all been positive." However, she's only gotten calls from three people talking about their favorite places to eat and sharing special memories. If you want to be included in the blog, call 200-4654.

Kaliher said she got the idea to do a blog on Old Orchard Beach's year-round restaurants when she was home over Christmas break and noticed there were a lot more restaurants open in town than she thought there were. She also said she heard a lot of talk in town about how great it was to have these places available to locals.

"What surprised me the most was the good following these restaurants have in a town that's supposedly closed down in the winter," Kaliher said.

She said that what sets some year-round restaurants apart from other restaurants is their attention to superior service and the types of things they offer diners, including special theme nights.

Kaliher also said these restaurants seem to be successful at staying open year-round due to their aggressive use of social media, particularly Facebook. For instance, she said, the owners of Hoss and Mary's will often post about food items they've just taken out of the oven. Also, on snowy days this winter, the restaurant offered special deals to plow drivers.

"What I learned is that they get a lot of good response from their Facebook postings and the way they use it brings in a lot of business," Kaliher said.

This coming weekend, Kaliher plans to attend the Taste of OOB event, which will be held on Sunday, May 6, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., in downtown. She hopes to do another pod cast from recorded interviews she'll do there.

"I've become a lot more interested in this project than I thought I would," she said. "And, I'm really enjoying doing the pod casts."

Kaliher said her project wouldn't have been possible without the changes going on in Old Orchard Beach during the past several years in terms of businesses staying open year-round.

She credits the efforts of both OOB365 and the revitalization of The Ballpark and said she's pleased to see that "more is being offered for actual residents" instead of business owners in town focusing solely on tourists.

Kaliher will be working as a chambermaid at the Kebek 3 hotel this summer and said when she graduates from college she wants to pursue a career in sports broadcasting.

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