

Bye-bye blue laws

Where to go when your Sunday brunch runs out of vodka

Best of New York

By BILL MORRIS

Top-Rated: West Side Wine

Andy Besch can hardly believe his good luck. Only a fraction of his competitors in the city have taken advantage of the new law that allows liquor stores to open on Sunday.

And Sunday, as Besch sees it, is a natural day to peddle his wares at West Side Wine - a tremendous array of reasonably priced wines (including 50 kosher varieties), Champagnes, ports and cognacs, plus a limited selection of high-quality liquors. Prices range from \$5 to \$350 a bottle, and free delivery is available.

"On Sunday people are home, they're relaxing, they're having friends over," says Besch, 56. "Opening on Sunday made idiot sense to me."

And it has made him look like a genius. Customers flock to the upper West Side shop from all corners of Manhattan on Sunday.

After working in marketing for cable networks for years, Besch took over 30-year-old West Side Wine in 1999, remodeled it and revamped the inventory. As soon as the new law went into effect last May, he decided to open on Sundays and close on Mondays.



Briganty for NEWS

Besch's West Side Wine is taking advantage of the new liquor law.

(The new law allows liquor stores to open any six days of the week.)

"I thought everyone was going to do it," Besch says of Sunday sales. "But there I was, charging up San Juan Hill, and I turned around and there was nobody behind me."

Liquor store owners who remain closed on Sunday cite a variety of factors, including religious observances, the desire to give employees (and themselves) a weekend day off to be with their families, and insufficient neighborhood foot traffic.

Meanwhile, many New Yorkers are still unaware that Sunday liquor sales are now legal - and are frequently available right in their neighborhood.

"This was the worst publicized thing on the face of the Earth," Besch says of the new law. "People still don't get it. They're elated when they discover we're open on Sunday, but they still don't get it."

As if to prove his point, Michael Scalisi, a screenwriter, walked into West Side Wine one recent Sunday afternoon and said, "Do you guys sell liquor on Sunday?"

Told that both liquor and wine were available, Scalisi said, "This is like seeing a UFO."

Besch's Sunday sales, already brisk, received a boost recently from an unexpected source: television.

"On the night of the last episode of 'Sex and the City,' people wanted to make Cosmopolitans, so I memorized the recipe," says Besch, admitting that it wasn't all that hard to remember vodka and triple sec.

"The next Sunday it was the Academy Awards - and people wanted Champagne. And then the first episode of the new 'Sopranos' season - and we sold a lot of Chianti and Italian red wines."

For Besch, the best part of the business, regardless of the day of the week, is building trust by surprising customers with a great value. As examples he cites Comte de Gascogne, a French sparkling wine, at just \$9 a bottle; or Txomin Etxaniz, an unusual white wine from the Basque region of Spain, for \$16.

"People are grateful for the convenience," Besch says of his Sunday hours. "I can wave to people as they walk by, and dogs drag their owners in here because they know we have Milk Bones behind the counter."

"The vibe on Sunday is great."

West Side Wine

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