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It's not just a man's drink anymore Steak, whisky, cigars and an education were on the menu



By Al Sullivan
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The private invitation to the Liberty Prime Steakhouse on Sept. 18 said "Scotch & Cigar Dinner." But it was much more than that, providing the 40 select guests with a taste of The Macallan brand of Scotch whisky, and also with an education into the history and some of the changes in reputation the classic drink has undergone in recent years.

The Macallan Scotch whisky featured at this event amounted to a tasting of one of the world's most recognized brands.

"We sent out invitations to a customer base and it sold out quickly," said Karl Halligan, managing partner and co-owner, with John Mondry and George Makrogiannis.

Guests to the three hour whisky tasting were greeted at the bottom of the stairs by two models and six foot high sign for Macallan Scotch.

But this was not a male-only affair. Many of the guests came in couples and most were decked out in evening wear, as befitted Liberty Prime's image as a high end establishment.

As market manager, she said she has hosted events like this in various parts of the state, talking about Macallan in particular, and why it is so unique.

"This is a well-respected Scotch whisky that has won recognition world-wide," she said.

She said it is a drink that is often successfully paired with a great menu.

Her mission is to make people aware of this, and to educate the public on whisky and its wider range of possibilities. This is a push by Macallan to make people aware that like wine, Scotch whisky can be used as a drink with food and in cooking, providing its own unique flavors.

She said she was personally familiar with the taste and quality of scotch, and so it was easy for her to promote it to the public.

"This is no longer just a man's drink," she said. She pointed to the number of women in the room for this event.

Giron said various courses were cooked with different ages of Macallan Scotch, from 10 to 15 year old varieties.

The event also dispelled another myth involving the setting. This Scotch whisky tasting took place in one of the



Karl Halligan, John Mondry and George Makrogiannis.

When I drink, I drink whisky." – Elba Giron

Elba Giron, who looked more like a fashion model than a North Jersey marketing manager for a liquor distillery, was on hand to debunk several myths and to provide information about whisky in general, and about the products of her employer.

The most persistent myth is that whisky is solely a man's drink. While this might have been true once, it isn't any more and part of it, Giron said, is the effort by whisky companies such as Macallan to rebrand their products, the way tequila and gin have, as gender-neutral.

"When I drink, I drink whisky," she said, during a brief interview prior to the event. She also stressed the importance of responsible drinking that the industry itself has been trying to promote.

"Women today are enjoying whisky the same way that men are," she said. "In fact, both men and women are starting to enjoy cocktails, like a classic Old Fashioned or Blood & Sand."

A Kearny girl

Giron has been in the business for years, working her way up from barmaid to manager for the company. Her territory includes most of Northern New Jersey and includes places like Phillipsburg and White Horse Station as well as Jersey City and other portions of Hudson County.

"I was born in Elizabeth and raised in Kearny," she said. "I'm a Kearny girl." She said she's been with the company for about two and a half years.

"I have a background in hospitality," she said. She started as a bartender, and has worked in some prestigious New York City restaurants with some highly-honored chefs, and this propelled her into the spirit and food industry.

"I was building a foundation when the company took me under its wing," she said. "It was a good fit."

A whole different market

Giron said she came to talk about whisky, its uses, and its changing image in society as a man's drink that has become more popular with women.

more upscale places in downtown Jersey City, a multi-floor restaurant and bar whose owners say they have served nearly 40,000 high profile business people since opening its doors earlier this year.

Halligan said this was a presentation by the company for Macallan Scotch at one of its flagship distribution taverns.

The steak house has several levels, with a fine dining room on the first floor, along with another area that includes a full bar, large screen TVs and additional tables. The tasting took place in the loft area overlooking the first floor, an intimate, yet spacious area that included its own bar and about fifteen tables. Large ceiling fans circulated the cool air. The dark wood and red painted walls give the whole place a sense of quiet eloquence.

Whisky (spelled without an e when it comes to Scotch) has a mythical place in American culture, something that denotes power and prestige. But it is individual taste that brings most people to it as a drink.

"Whisky is special for each person," Giron said. "It's the moment, the celebration, the person they are sharing with that makes every dram special."

In her talk, she said Scotch whisky is divided into five distinct categories: single malt Scotch, single grain Scotch, blended malt Scotch (formerly called "vatted malt" or "pure malt"), blended grain Scotch, and blended Scotch.

"In America the best image I can associate it with is Scotch as a luxury and fine spirit, and most Americans enjoy that feeling," Giron said.

Perhaps as important was the food served, a four course dinner with each element prepared with a different kind of Macallan.

"I was fortunate enough to enjoy every course and loved the food," she said. "The porterhouse was seasoned so well and it was mouthwatering."

As with many places, the busiest nights at Liberty Prime are Friday and Saturday, but some business people use the place for meetings during the week. The place opens at 10 a.m. Monday through Friday, and offers brunch. On Sundays, they open at about 11 a.m.

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SHOTS FOR TASTING – Guests got to taste several different whisky products.



GREAT WITH FOOD – The four-course dinner was prepared with different kinds of Macallan whisky.