

Our Famous Professionals Vincent Michael Coiro III

Vinny Coiro owns not just the area's only true cocktail bar, but an adjoining cigar club for good measure. The Wise Ash Lounge & Speakeasy at 59 Washington Ave in Endicott boasts "America's largest martini menu," while Sir Vin Cigars on the second floor provides aficionados with a cigar shop as well as indoor and outdoor lounges for smoking. We spoke with Vinny about the Wise Ash's prohibition-era theme and why he decided now was a good time to open a place like this here. (See photos on pages 4 and 5.)

Q: How long have you been at this location?
VC: The Wise Ash Lounge & Speakeasy has been here as of January 8th it will be two years coming up. And we've been here almost two years prior to that serving cigars, which started downstairs and moved upstairs as we've built up.

Q: You own the building?

Yep. We have all three floors available, 10,000 square feet.

Q: Are you from the area originally?

No. Originally from Long Island, Brooklyn, then Massapequa. And then all over: Florida, California, Los Angeles, different places. But came up here for my last five years before I retired from the insurance and investment industry, when I took over New York for the company, and decided to stay up here because I love the area.

Q: What did you do in the insurance and investment industry?

Started out at Prudential, then went over to Allstate and started their life and investment program with 13 other individuals nationwide, and then I finished up with Aon Financial, which at the time was the world's largest investment company with 170 different locations.

Q: So you came to this area in order to set up an office?

I did the recruiting and everything else. I had offices from Buffalo to Plattsburgh to Long Island. This was totally the center of everything. I could drive anywhere in three and a half, four hours, including if I needed to be in Philadelphia, Manhattan, end of Long Island, Plattsburgh, Boston, anywhere else.

Q: Binghamton is within a six-hour drive of more population than any other city in North America.

Yeah, I wouldn't doubt it in heartbeat.

So you're here as a regional manager for insurance and financial products. What makes you decide to do the Wise Ash Lounge?

It started out with a dream back in 1980 when I was in the Marine Corp. What I wanted to do was open up something when I retired that would be totally for my likes, like a hobby plus. And I narrowed it down over the years until about 1988-89 and I came up with the idea I wanted to do a bar and smoking lounge. Unfortunately, over the years the laws in New York State changed, and as of 2002 if you weren't grandfathered in you couldn't do both. So I had to come up with ways to work out both, because there's always a way to do something with the will. I started out first with the cigar business, and when the time was ripe I found a facility here with multiple floors, which is how I was able to do it. I was able to come up with a place where you could drink and smoke, although the first floor, which is the real bar you cannot smoke in because it's against New York State law.

Q: So people go up to the second floor.

Correct. We have an open deck, 1200 square feet, as well as inside the cigar lounge itself we have a place where you can carry your drinks without going downstairs, without breaking any rules and regulations, and you can enjoy your favorite beverage with a smoke.

Q: Then you have a third floor too.

Third floor is designed for private parties and gatherings of various sorts, bachelor and bachelorette parties, corporate functions, whatever. And that will hold about 100 people. It's set up like a gigantic living room with leather couches, pool table, foosball, card room, kitchen, bathroom, shower, tub, the works.

Q: Tell me a little about the prohibition-era speakeasy theme.

There's a number of different avenues that the theme came about. One is that the facility itself has an unbelievable history that dates back to real prohibition, where in the early 1920s it was a true speakeasy on the second floor. And the third floor used to be a brothel called Mattis brothel. She was a famous madam who had brothels throughout the United States, one of them being here. The other way I had ended up getting involved is I had done a movie about Bradford, PA, which was the home to two notorious gangsters in the '20s that came about because of prohibition. One was Al Capone and the other was Al Ritchie. It was all about prohibition and the speakeasys and it just seemed to

be a time that if you were alive during it and in any way connected to it you had your fortune made. It made many many people quite the millionaire during that period of time. The movie never ended up getting released, but it had a lot of stars tied to it. We're talking Ray Liotta, Marisa Tomei, two of the guys from the Sopranos.

Q: Why was Al Capone in Bradford?

That's where they ended up putting their headquarters because it was close enough to the Canadian border and it was a small quiet town. Bradford, PA, is known for bootlegging, but before that what made it flourish was it was the first place in North America to discover oil. It was a happening place back in the day. And there are still active speakeasys that have been reconditioned over there.

Q: How did you get involved in the movie business?

I'd done a couple of movies when I was out in California, one of them being called *Hard as Nails*, which became a cult movie. It was a martial arts film, between the Japanese Yakuza and the Russian mob. I was managing on a part-time basis for my friend a strip club/dance club, if you will. And they wanted to do filming there, and that's how I got my lead into the first movie that led me into the second movie that led me into the third.

Q: In what capacity?

I'm an actor. I ended up getting my Screen Actors Guild card and so forth from that. It was just a lot of fun. I was never a major actor, but all you gotta do is have a speaking piece and be in there more than eight to ten seconds. I actually have copies of one of the movies, *Hard as Nails*, which is pretty good. It came out in 2002.

Q: Now 100% of your efforts are concentrated on the Wise Ash and the cigar business?

Correct. Make sure people understand that it is a non-smoking bar that has the facilities on the second floor through the cigar business for people to be able to enjoy a cigarette or cigar during the winter time as well as the summer.

Q: Talking about New York State laws, do you have to get a special license to be a cigar club?

Yes. There's a tobacco license, retail license that was needed to open up the cigar part of the industry. Ninety percent of the business is coming from smoking paraphernalia, though we're only talking cigars. We don't offer cigarettes and none of that hookah stuff. It's strictly a place for gentlemen

(continued on page 4)

Paul Juser and The City from Another Universe



Is Binghamton's Relationship with Students Shawcrossed?

We have a saying roundabout these parts: "If Binghamton did anything half-assed, it would be an improvement." On rare occasions, the people of Binghamton have been willing to put in the whole butt, and any walk through Downtown will show you what a giant butt it can be.

Arthur Shawcross was a brutal murderer of 11 women in Rochester, NY. In the 6th grade, listening to details of Shawcross's pursuit and capture was the first time I learned about prostitutes and the modern serial killer. This was no romanticized Jack the Ripper, this was a monster choking and beating women to death in the streets and stashing them under bridges so he could return weeks later

to masturbate while watching them decompose.

According to Shawcross, his career as a murderer began in Vietnam where he claimed to have been given free range to prowl and kill in the jungle as he pleased. No record exists to support this, of course, but even Shawcross couldn't remember how many victims fell to his growing sadism. In previous wars, soldiers had a month on a troop ship to change personalities; Vietnam was the first where soldiers could be in a war zone one day and with their families the next. With two wars drawing to a close in our time, it is Shawcross we should be thinking of. When he returned home to Watertown, NY, Shawcross was still hungry.

If you ask me, the real monster is the criminal justice system that gave less than 15 years to a man guilty of raping, murdering, and mutilating two children. Then, as is now, when New York State needs to place scum like this in a community, Binghamton is where they look first. According to logs available to schools and day cares, many of the faces leering from front porches across from the Binghamton Post Office are registered sex-offenders and child molesters. Lock up your wives, daughters, mothers, and pets when you go to collect your mail.

Shawcross was given a home in the former church on the corner of Munsel and Chenango

St., where he was expected to live quietly and not make trouble. Only a few weeks were needed for Shawcross's history to get out, and in a rare display of public decency, Arthur Shawcross was driven out of town and on to infamy. If there are any corpses to his credit in our city, Shawcross took that knowledge to his grave.

As I rode my bike along the River Walk in the days before students moved into the shiny new housing, I was astounded by the distinct lack of broken glass and trash that had decorated the pavement for months. All summer I'd slalomed to avoid slashing my tires or riding through goose, dog, horse, or human feces. But all had been hosed away. The only drunks on park benches were students who moved in early and couldn't find their way back to the West Side the night before. A new Binghamton was being presented for the kids who would soon be living and spending and driving our shiny new roundabout.

IBM is gone. Link is gone. Even Boscov's and BAE are only tied to us by the thinnest threads. Bars, head shops, and Subway are the only Downtown businesses thriving. Trash and toothless meth addicts are no way to attract people to live here. In the days before the students moved in for a new school year, Binghamton looked presentable. If we want those students to stay and work and rebuild our economy, at least one posterior cheek will be necessary to convince them.