

BUSINESS BUILT ON BAR TIPS

off the mountain

By Nichole Bonner



West Hartford native Bronya Shillo has always had a strong sense of adventure and a creative mindset. While she was a student at Renbrook School, you could find her exploring her backyard all the way up to Heublein Tower. As she grew older, the hikes became less frequent when she started working at her family's restaurant, The Pequot Inn, on Fishers Island, New York.

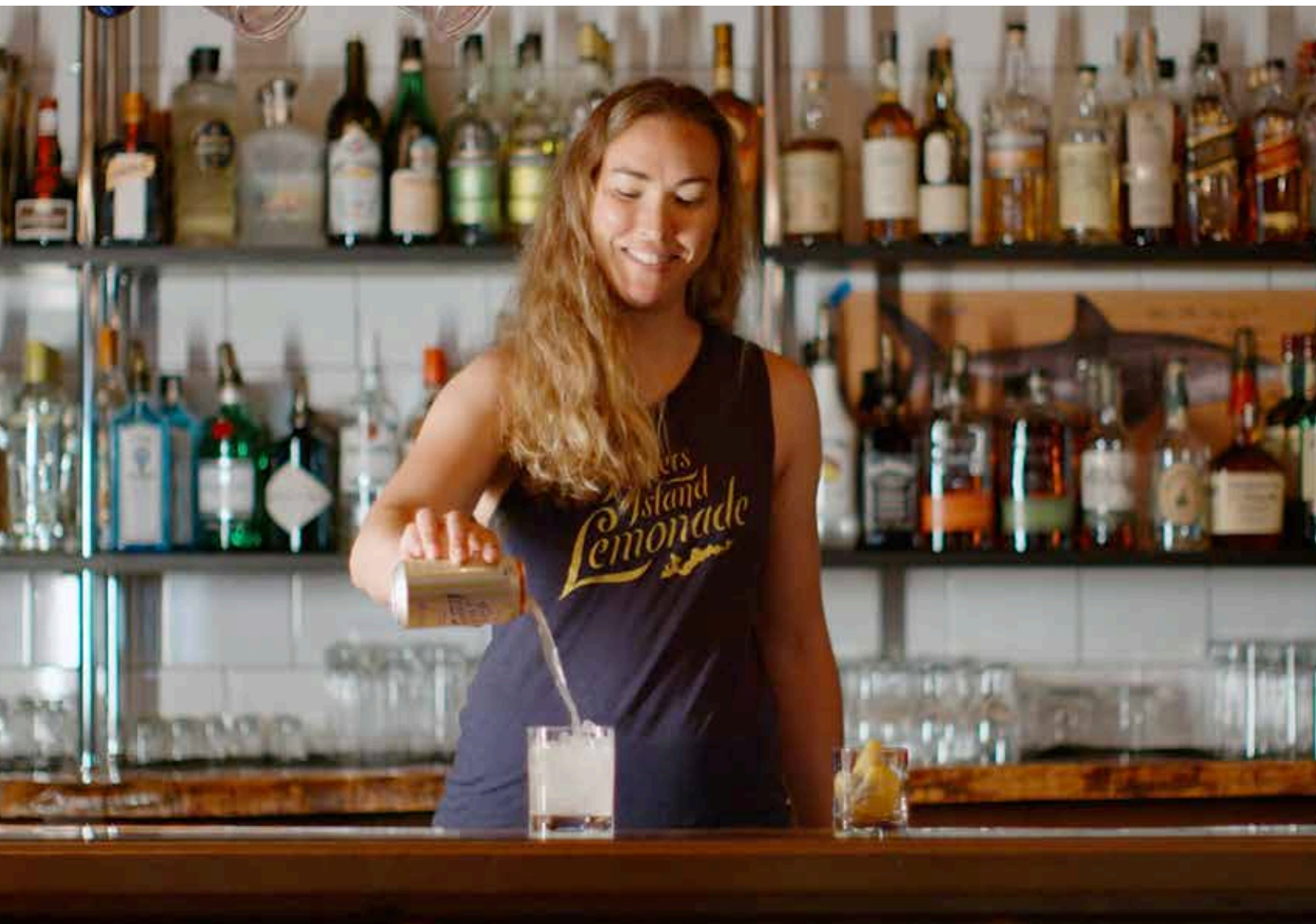
That sense of adventure, curiosity, and responsibility instilled in her from a young age was perhaps the perfect recipe for her to launch her own company, Fishers Island Lemonade.

Although the vodka- and whiskey-spiked lemonade recipe from The Pequot Inn was not an entirely new concept, Bronya is the one who decided to research the possibility of distributing a canned cocktail version to meet demand and bring the nostalgic beverage to the mainland. She was adamant that the drink remain non-carbonated, yet still maintain shelf stability. She used her bar tips to fund the project and worked for more than two years to perfect the recipe and refine the brand for mass distribution.

“As a female-founded start-up in the middle of a male-dominated beverage industry, I knew I had to position the brand differently than the craft IPAs, spiked seltzers, and malt beverages hitting the market,” said Bronya. “My distribution partners had to understand that premium canned cocktails are a new category, and they have to be marketed to a different demographic.”

Bronya first launched the product Memorial Day weekend 2014, and soon after, Fishers Island Lemonade was distributed throughout Connecticut. It can be found in four-packs, averaging \$15 for four 12-ounce cans, at many liquor stores in West Hartford, including M & R Liquors, Valley Wines, and Total Wine & More. It is also available by the can at several local restaurants.





Brand awareness is one of the top priorities for the entrepreneur. Fishers Island Lemonade is recognized for its yellow-and-white-striped cans and New England summer feel. While looking at Instagram @filemonade, you can almost smell the sea breeze. The team of full-time staff and more than a dozen brand ambassadors can be found at many events throughout New England and their first southern territory, Georgia, to bring “liquid to lips.” Once you try it, there’s no going back!

Bronya has a few pieces of advice as she looks back on the past six years. “Buckle. Up.,” she says with a laugh. “Get ready to put in the work. You don’t get to clock in and out, so do

your research. Don’t underestimate the amount of energy starting a business takes, but celebrate the small wins and remember why you are doing what you are doing and what you are doing it for. There will always be a community of people looking out for you and cheering you on.”

Fishers Island Lemonade is made with premium vodka, barrel-aged whiskey, lemon, and honey. It is gluten-removed; has no artificial sweeteners, colors, or flavors; and is cholesterol and fat-free. Each can is two cocktail servings and packs a punch at 9% ABV. The cocktail is very versatile and can be used to make other mixed drinks, from a Shandy to a Margarita!

For more recipes or to find retailers that carry Fishers Island Lemonade, visit www.filemonade.com.

For more on Bronya Shillo’s Fishers Island Lemonade story, scan this QR Code or visit <http://bit.ly/FIL-Video>.



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