

THOMAS B. CONSTANTINO ENTREPRENEURIAL AWARD

Second Act Spirits Stacey and Rich Michaels



Entrepreneurship often begins with a leap of faith. For Stacey and Rich Michaels, that leap became Second Act Spirits, a farm distillery rooted in local agriculture, craftsmanship, and community. Their dedication to building a business from the ground up has earned them the Thomas B. Constantino Entrepreneurial Award from the Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The award recognizes a Chamber member who embodies the entrepreneurial spirit by organizing, managing, and assuming the risks of building a business and persevering to see those efforts succeed. Named in memory of Thomas B. Constantino, founder of The Noteworthy Company in Amsterdam, the honor celebrates leadership, determination, creativity, and vision. Those qualities are clearly reflected in the Michaels' journey.

Before launching their own distillery, both Stacey and Rich spent years working in the craft beverage industry. Along the

way, they collaborated with brewers, distillers, and winemakers, gaining valuable knowledge and insight. Eventually, they realized that the skills they had developed could become the foundation for a venture of their own.

"We had worked with so many craft producers over the years," Rich explained. "At some point we realized this was something we could do ourselves."

That realization became the beginning of Second Act Spirits. The name reflects both the entrepreneurial leap and the couple's desire to create something meaningful using the experience they had gained.

From the beginning, the Michaels built their distillery around a "grain-to-glass" philosophy. As a New York farm distillery, at least 75 percent of ingredients must be grown in New York State. For Second Act Spirits, that number is even higher, now approaching 99 percent.

Their commitment to sourcing locally is central to their identity. The approach not only ensures quality ingredients but also strengthens relationships with farmers across the state.

"It creates a symbiotic relationship between the distiller and the farmer," Rich said. "Every bottle supports a circular local economy." That philosophy can be tasted in the distillery's flagship spirits. Clocktower Bourbon, named after the iconic Sanford Clock Tower building where their tasting room is located, has earned two gold medals in national competitions, including the John Barleycorn Awards. Dad's Garden Gin, crafted with botanicals including juniper and locally sourced elderflower, has also received a gold medal and has become one of their most popular products. Rounding out the lineup is Second Act Vodka, produced with New York sourced ingredients and often infused with flavors that reflect the region's agricultural bounty, such as apples and grapes.

While the products themselves have gained recognition, the road to success required persistence. When the Michaels first launched their spirits, they personally visited liquor stores and restaurants, often hearing skepticism from those unsure whether a small new brand could compete.

"We knocked on a lot of doors," Stacey recalled. "Sometimes people weren't ready yet. It took time for them to hear our story and see the quality of the product."

Customer support played a crucial role in that journey. As more people discovered their spirits, customers began requesting them at restaurants and retailers. That grassroots demand helped open doors that once seemed closed.

Today, the distillery's tasting room in the historic Sanford Clock Tower Building has become a gathering place for the community. The space not only highlights their craft spirits but also celebrates the city's history. Visitors often share stories of working in the building when it housed manufacturing operations decades ago, creating connections between Amsterdam's past and its future.

Events have also become an important part of the business. Programs such as Scandal and Spirits, trivia nights, workshops, and themed gatherings bring new audiences through the doors while showcasing local history, arts, and culture. Collaborations with businesses such as Sunny Hunny Farms and regional restaurants further strengthen ties throughout the community.

For the Michaels, entrepreneurship is as much about people as it is about products. They remain hands-on in every aspect of the business, from production and sales to bartending and customer conversations. "No one can tell your story better than you can," Stacey said.

Looking ahead, the couple hopes to expand production within the Clock Tower building, allowing them to bring more of the distilling process on site and eventually offer tours to visitors. Their long-term vision is not to become a national brand but to build a strong regional one rooted in authenticity.

"This is our second act," Rich said. "Our goal is to create a great local company that people here are proud of."



SECOND ACT SPIRITS

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