

# The Bartender's Life

## LOOKING TO PORTLAND COCKTAIL WEEK 2015 . . . WITH A WHO'S WHO OF PORTLAND COCKTAIL WEEK 2014

by Éva Pelczer

Here's a word kicking around in bartender circles: sustainability—the career kind. “We have a great big vision,” says Lindsay Johnson, one of the founders of Portland Cocktail Week. “We want to make sure everyone has the opportunity to stay in this business for rest of their lives.”

So many bartenders feel the same way that the original grassroots event in 2010 has become a major weeklong educational festival for industry professionals nationwide. What's even more remarkable is that it's almost entirely staffed, organized and run by the bartenders attending it.

This crew of people magnetized the bartending industry with its by-bartenders-for-bartenders credo, and four years later PDXCW is a white-hot week of seminars, events, idea-swapping and community bonding, modeled on a boarding-school structure.

With PDXCW15 poised to become one of this year's biggest cocktail events, we asked a few of its architects, longtime organizers, presenters and new members to talk about their experiences—and about the game-changing year ahead.

PHOTO: NATASHA MOUSTACHE



### John Nugent

(Varsity & Head of Transportation)  
Seattle, WA  
3 years at PDXCW

“It's an exciting time for PDXCW. It's bigger, better, has more organization and brands are noticing. I see people from Alabama talking to someone from NYC and exchanging ideas. I feel like I meet someone new on each bus, from D.C., Arizona, anywhere.”

PHOTO: NATASHA MOUSTACHE



### Britany Leach (JV)

Birmingham, AL  
1 year at PDXCW

“I really believe in PDXCW because it's fun, but it's so education-focused. I'd go to morning staff and Varsity meetings, to all my classes and then do what needs to happen to execute the events. You're so on fire about what you're learning, being tired goes out the window. I got the chance to sit across the table from Jim Meehan and Charles Joly. That was really amazing—to have two people who are so well versed in these things pass along their knowledge to you.”

PHOTO: NATASHA MOUSTACHE



### Steva Casey

(Resident Advisor & Head of Volunteer Coordination)  
Birmingham, AL  
3 years at PDXCW

“People will always ask, ‘How can I help?’ I saw volunteers from last year who were students this year and students who wanted to be more involved. I really believe in PDXCW and I love it for its education aspect. Ultimately, these kinds of things will beget other smaller cocktail weeks in other cities.”

PHOTO: NATASHA MOUSTACHE



### Jessica Sanders

(Varsity & Presenter)  
Austin, TX  
3 years at PDXCW

“Here's what's changed the most: People aren't just hungrier for information; they want very specific information. The nerdier the better! We're moving towards curriculum that's instructive instead of anecdotal. People who were students in earlier years are feeling more empowered in their knowledge and what they can share, and that spans a huge range of topics.”

PHOTO: ALLISON WEBBER



**Phoebe Esmon**

(Resident Advisor & Presenter)  
Philadelphia, PA  
2 years at PDXCW

"It's a really unique atmosphere here, and this event has sort of grown up. Unlike other cocktail weeks it's aimed at us, the professionals, as professional development. It reminds me of the first week of graduate school."

PHOTO: AKENJI MIZUMORI



**Melodie Buell**

(PDXCW Director of Events in 2015)  
Bend, OR  
4 years at PDXCW

"We're really talking about very direct education. Every class is thought through. On a very light level this year we partnered with a daycare—I want to show that we understand that this is a lifelong career."

In 2015, we're also debuting our Masters program! It's for students who completed our program in the past two years and showed a level of excellence in their career since. It gives us an opportunity to continue to inspire at all levels."

PHOTO: CAMERON SMITH



**Angel Teta** (Varsity)

Portland, OR  
4 years at PDXCW

"I'm basically in charge of all the logistical stuff Melodie doesn't have time for: loading, product management, coordination of supplies. It's my job to entertain any idea and maybe if I can bring a solution for you, I will. This year's model really worked and next year it'll be more even streamlined, more creative. I really think next year will be super cool!"

PHOTO: GABI PORTER



**Brandon Wise** (Varsity)

Denver, CO  
Founder at PDXCW

"I had to email Audrey Saunders [to lecture that first year] out of the blue. It was a long shot and she responded, 'Absolutely, I'd love to.' I've had so many experiences now with responses like that. We've had some brilliant people and some wacky people, and they've come up with some remarkable events. A lot of ideas happened on cocktail napkins and to see them come to fruition and be actualized is really cool."

PHOTO: NATISHA MOUSTACHE



**Keli Rivers** (Resident Advisor)

San Francisco, CA  
4 years at PDXCW

"One of our seasoned bartenders from San Francisco was putting Giants stickers on everyone [for the World Series] so one bartender from Kansas contacted the Kansas City Royals, and they overnighted him a few hundred Kansas City stickers. We get geeked out about stirring technique and ice, but something this sports-like can bring out this other side of us that's more playful. I always leave PDXCW reinvigorated and recommitted to my craft."

PHOTO: VIRGINIA MAEROLLISON



**Nick Korn** (Captain of Varsity)

Boston, MA  
2 years at PDXCW

"A fundamental passion of mine is showing brands and press that more and more of us have chosen this profession for life, and this isn't a transitive thing. We've dedicated ourselves. I think that it's very clear this program is growing into a professional development project."

**Portland Cocktail Week 2015  
takes place October 17–23.**