

AKHR Newsletter

Q1 2025



News & Events

[Ballot Measure 1 FAQ](#)

[Mandatory ID checks for alcohol sales in restaurants, breweries, and bars](#)

April 8-9: 43rd Annual Alaska Governor's Safety and Health Conference, Egan Center.
[REGISTER HERE](#)

Upcoming Training

[ServSafe training - Saturday, April 12, 2025](#)

[TiPs Recertification Monday 3/24/2025](#)

[TiPs Full Class - Sunday, 4/6/2025](#)

[Reserving Online Alcohol Certification 4/2/2025](#)

[Online Security Training Program \(NSC\)](#)



Featured Member: Van and Nicki Hale, Vans Dive Bar

If you told Van Hale, one of the co-founders of the venerable Marx Bros Café, that he'd be the owner of a dive bar serving up local music instead of gourmet dishes, he may not have believed you. But in 2016, Van and his wife, Nicki Hale, closed the deal on Kings X, a Fairview neighborhood haunt, and set out to transform it into a musicians' mecca.

Van first came to Alaska on a US Coast Guard icebreaker in 1967, doing all the baking at sea for 200 men. He returned a decade later and found work managing the Jade Room for a few years and co-founded the Marx Bros after that. Van's future wife, Nicki, arrived in 1979 from California as a single mom and got a job at the Egan Convention Center, booking all the catering and banquets with just banquet waitress experience.

"I came up for the work. You could get 10 jobs in a day. There was so much work and no talent," Nicki says of Anchorage in the late 70s.

The impetus for buying Kings X and focusing on local live music came from Van's youngest son, a musician, and his wife who approached Van and Nicki about the opportunity. While Van was still at the Marx Bros, the husband and wife team embarked on a new journey with their son and daughter-in-law, purchasing the Kings X business and making modifications on the interior of the building built by George and Peggy Brown, owners of the Lucky Wishbone. Next came the name change to Van's Dive Bar to lean into the "dive" feeling.

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For Members: alaskahospitalityretailers.org/members

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The team built a stage and put in a sound system to accommodate live acts. Booking bands began with the help of Justin Boot, the man behind the Trapper Creek Bluegrass Festival. In April 2017, they debuted live music at Van's. Eventually, the younger couple left Alaska, leaving the bar in Van and Nicki's capable hands.

Today, they have live music Friday and Saturday nights, plus a bluegrass jam starting at 5pm Sunday evenings that turns into Open Mic Night at 8pm. Van even offers up his famous chili or some other tasty morsels for free on Sundays.

On Wednesday nights, there's karaoke, and on Thursdays you might find a DJ, a singer/songwriter, or even a band, depending on what they can book for the night. Add a pool table, dance floor, a full bar, and an eclectic selection of art and artifacts, and you've got the perfect recipe for a friendly spot for entertainment and community.

Running a popular bar is a far cry from managing a high-end restaurant, and it comes with its own set of challenges, particularly liquor licensing. As with many other local beverage establishments, COVID forced Van's to close down for 120 days, putting their staff out of work. During that tumultuous time, Van cooked meals for his employees who had no other source of income.

Van and Nicki were able to get funding from the Muni to expand their outdoor deck behind the bar

and were able to serve drinks outside.

They eventually obtained a Payment Protection Program loan and money from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, thanks to Nicki's past experience writing grants, to help them ride out the pandemic. Nicki also encouraged other local restaurant and bar owners to apply for funding as quickly as possible to get the extra support.

Both Van and Nicki agree that the best part of running Van's Dive Bar is the community that has formed around this small, hole-in-the-wall venue. They get a kick out of the recognition as well.

"We're on an airplane, and Van is wearing a Van's Dive Bar hat, and young kids will come up to him and say, 'I love that place!' It happens to Van all the time," says Nicki, adding "People always thank us. 'Thank you so much for having this place,' 'Thank you for giving a place for musicians,' 'Thanks for giving us a place to go.' A community. This is a real community, an artists' community."

What's next for Van's Dive Bar? Coming up in June 2025 will be Vanniversary #7, an annual live music extravaganza with 28 bands playing on alternating stages starting at 3pm and ending at 3am. And if any musician comes to town, any day of the week, there's always a stage and audience at Van's ready to welcome them.

