

## West End ownership changes hands: Q&A with former owner Josh Ezrine

*Q: Why did you decide to sell West End?*

A: I had been looking for someone to buy it for a few years. I'd been there 10 years, and I have a young son, and it's just not fair to him. I'm not 23 years old anymore. It's hard to work till 3 a.m. and then come home and take care of your family and give your son the attention he deserves, the attention he needs.

*Q: What are some of the struggles in keeping an Elon business open and profitable?*

A: It's tough not getting the support that you need from the community, as well as the university. You would think that, as a local business, West End would deserve and get more support. Student support has always been great, always steady. But from my perspective, being there 10 years, it seems like the university still looks upon West End like a black sheep in the community.

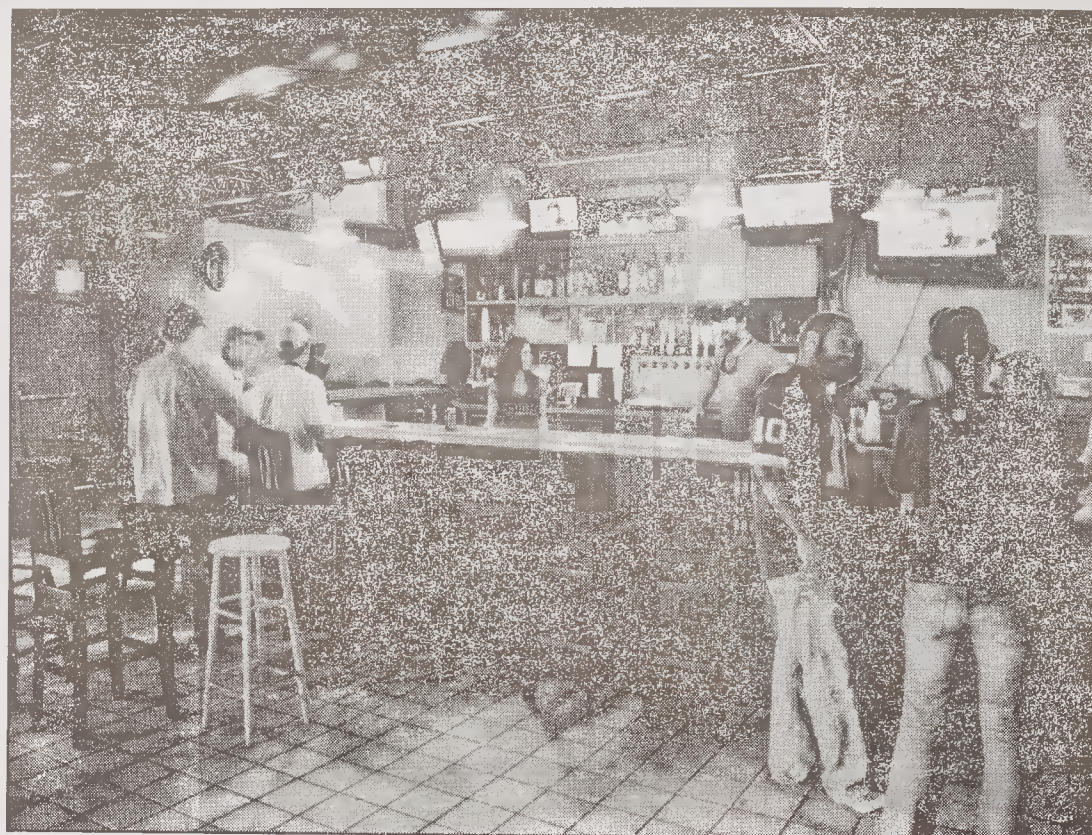
*Q: Why would the university consider West End a "black sheep"? What kind of drinking environment did you provide for students under your ownership?*

A: West End is a place in which kids who are over 21 can drink in a safe environment. It's not illegal. It's heavily supervised. We made sure to watch over the students, to give them one of the few safe places where they could go out and drink responsibly, with some level of supervision.

*Q: How is student drinking at West End different from where they might go off campus, otherwise?*

A: You hear about those incidents with alcohol poisoning, the horror stories where kids wind up in the hospital, sometimes even dead. And it's just about always at off-campus parties. They might not tell you that, you might not hear about it, but it's definitely there, and it happens just about every weekend. At West End, we're diligent. We're watching over students. We're making sure no one underage drinks, and we're making sure those who are 21 are drinking responsibly. Our first concern is your safety.

Compiled by Michael Bodley, assistant news editor



Josh Ezrine, former owner of West End Station, sold the establishment in order to spend time with his family. TARA WIRTH | Staff Photographer

## Familiar face challenges incumbent Ronnie Wall for mayor of Burlington

Michael Bodley  
Assistant News Editor

After graduating from Elon University five years ago, Ian Baltutis never left Burlington. And he's now trying to unseat incumbent Ronnie Wall as the next mayor of the city.

Baltutis is new to politics and he faces a recognizable candidate with political experience in Wall. Wall has been mayor since 2007, and he was challenged for his seat only once in 2009.

But Baltutis has done his homework, preparing a comprehensive campaign strategy under the guidance of seasoned veterans of local politics.

"At the very beginning of the campaign, we spent quite a number of weeks meeting with different elected officials and previously elected officials from around the country to gauge strategy and get feedback for the Burlington community," he said. "We really wanted to figure out the direction that would be best for Burlington."

Baltutis points to his business background as experience enough, political pedi-

gree aside. He has built a business from the ground up since graduating from Elon with a degree in business administration. His start-up, The Vibration Solution, has grown to become the world's largest producer of ultra-soft polymers, which are used to quiet the noise made by dishwashers and other large household appliances.

But Baltutis' business experience may not be enough to win the election, according to Kenneth Fernandez, assistant professor of political science and director of the Elon Poll.

"A candidate who had prior experience serving on a city council or a school board might have an advantage over someone who is a businessman," Fernandez said.

At the same time, local elections tend to have much lower voter turnouts than those on the national stage, making the results difficult to predict.

"The key thing to keep in mind with any type of local election, particularly with a smaller place, is most people just don't know much about all of the candidates," said Jason Husser, assistant professor of political science and assistant director of the Elon

Poll. "That makes these kind of elections extremely volatile. Often we don't know how elections will go until they actually happen. You sometimes see a correlation by alphabetical order of name and their vote share."

In order to accomplish his goals once in office, Baltutis craves the support of a particular demographic that has been conspicuously absent from Burlington over the last decade: people aged 18-40.

Over the past decade, Burlington has grown by 11.5 percent as a whole. But the 18-40 age group has seen no growth at all. Young professionals are finishing school and leaving Burlington behind, a trend Baltutis would very much like to see reversed.

"We need to grow across all age demographics, in order to make sure we strengthen our economy not only today, but for the coming decade," he said. "The economy needs young people, needs new ideas."

And while he seeks to keep younger people in Burlington, Baltutis is still young himself, which may complicate his campaign planning.

"The key challenge for young people to overcome is to establish credibility early on

in the race, so that people can see them as a person of maturity," Husser said. "And that's not necessarily easy to do in a race that people might not pay that much attention to to begin with."

If he wins the election, Baltutis has plans to more closely integrate Elon with the Burlington community. He pointed out that the Elon BioBus is open to the general public, though many members of the community think it's only available to students.

The BioBus is part of a larger plan of Baltutis' to overhaul the city's public transportation system, slowly, as not to overwhelm the city with exorbitant costs that have caused previous efforts to fail.

He also has spoken with the Love School of Business about a program that would match entrepreneurial Elon students with local businesses in an internship of sorts that would benefit local businesses while giving students real world experience.

"The idea being that there's no better way to get this experience on an entry level than to get down and dirty, hands on, with somebody that's fighting for their business' life," he said.