



# Riverboat Roar

Monthly Newsletter  
April 2025 Edition

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Welcome to our April edition of the Riverboat Roar Newsletter featuring information about the Valley Gem and the Major/Riviera Riverboats. Each month, we will spotlight upcoming events, staff, actors, menus, etc. Our Newsletter will be available to view on our website, on our Facebook Page, or by free email subscription. We hope you enjoy our publication and to see you on the river soon!

## Captain's Column

Heather Morgan Sands,  
Captain, Director of Operations

*How did you get involved in Captaining the Valley Gem and/or Major/Riviera?*

What started out as a marketing consultation, turned into a marriage and then ultimately a Captain's license. If you would have asked me in my 20s if this is what I would be doing today, I would have laughed. I have found that life isn't always what you expect it will be but often leads you to where you should be.

*What's your favorite type of trip to drive?*

I don't really have a favorite. As someone who does a lot of the planning for our events, it is very satisfying for me to see an event come together in every aspect, from the food to the entertainment to the happiness of our guests. When that happens, it is my favorite trip.

*What upcoming trip are you looking forward to?*

My favorite trip on the boats is Strings Sunday. I love orchestral music and there is nothing more relaxing than spending a Sunday afternoon listening to strings music and having a great lunch. However, we have a tremendous amount of new Holiday events this year that I am looking forward to those as well.

*What's the best part of being a riverboat captain?*

I would say it's the challenge. The job is harder than many think and there are so many logistical hurdles to overcome and those hurdles change daily. There are a lot of regulations and a tremendous amount of planning involved. We are very good at adapting and making quick changes to be sure the events run as smoothly as possible.



## New This Season: Disney SING-A-LONG



Meet some of your favorite characters while dining aboard the Major/Riviera as it cruises the Ohio River! Characters will offer meeting and greeting, photo ops, performances, activities, crafts, and more! Our actors from The Company at The Valley Gem have such a love and appreciation for the characters that we all connected with during childhood, and still bring us smiles and stories to this day. We're looking forward to bringing you our first ever Disney Sing-A-Long, where you and your family and friends can be a part of the fun through singing Disney classics and cruising with our characters on the Major/Riviera on Saturday, June 28 from 12pm to 2pm. Reservations are required.



# Chef's Menu Highlight



## Cinco De Mayo Dinner Cruise May 3rd 6-8pm

"Anytime I get the chance to cook food that reminds me of home, my heart smiles! We will be serving traditional Mexican dishes that I grew up with in Southern California. Using my family recipes and some

I've created over the years, you will not find anything like this around town! I can not wait to share this experience with you all!" - Chef Casandra Clark



# Now Accepting Applications

We have had a successful first Winter Season here at the Valley Gem and are incredibly proud of our crew that stayed on and worked with us. But now, Spring is here and Summer is coming and bringing with it a busy season. While our current crew is great, we are going to need more of them. We are currently accepting applications for Deckhand/Banquet Servers and also Kitchen Help. Applications can be found on our website at [www.valleygemsternwheeler.com](http://www.valleygemsternwheeler.com). Please make a note that all Deckhands will be required to pass a drug test and be part of a random drug testing pool. We will be reviewing applications until the middle of April when interviews will begin with hiring dates to land at the end of April and beginning of May.



# Crew Spotlight: Austin Harrow

**Name:** Austin Harrow

**Position:** Crew/Deckhand

**How long have you worked on the boat?** Three years

**Favorite food item you've eaten on the boat?** The blackened catfish from last year's Jazz on the River Dinner Cruise.

**Favorite thing about working on the boat?** Honestly, I love feeling like a part of history. Marietta, and Southeast Ohio as a whole, have a deep-seated history in the riverboat trade. Our namesake, the steamer Valley Gem was built in the Knox and Sons Boat yard, just a few blocks from our landing. Valley Gem ran the McConnelville-Zanesville trade, carrying passengers and cargo, occasionally offering excursion trips along the way. In total, over two-hundred steamboats piled the Muskingum River between the years of 1824 and 1921. So, to work on the last Sternwheeler making regular trips up and down the Muskingum River, over one-hundred years after the packet trade died out, is something quite special.

**Favorite trip you've worked or attended?** By far, my favorite trip to work is our Muskingum River Day Cruise. I've made no secret of the fact that my favorite thing to do is locking the Valley Gem through the Muskingum River's historic lock and dam system. This ten hour cruise takes us through three such lock and dams, starting at our landing in Marietta, Ohio, traveling roughly twenty-five miles upriver to Lock and Dam No. 4 in Beverly Oh, before returning to our landing downriver. I love listening to Captain Don discuss the history of the area and the significance it holds to our nation on the way to Lock No. 2 in Devola. I love seeing kids run and cling to the park fence, hoping to hear the Gem's bell ring as we pass through the Lowell Canal. and I love the canopy of leaves when they turn to auburn over the Beverly Canal in mid October.

**What are you most looking forward to in the 2025 season?** I'm really excited to start our Ohio River Day Cruise this season. I'm a firm believer that we live on the prettiest section of the Ohio River, and if I'm being honest, getting above Willow Island Lock and Dam kind of feels like taking a trip to a nearby city. A refreshing change of pace and welcome one at that.





# Actor Spotlight: Sabrina Wittekind

Sabrina Wittekind is a lifelong performer with a deep love for the arts in all forms. She trained in tap, jazz, and hip-hop at Jessica's Dance Company and has explored a variety of styles, including Bollywood and Latinx dance. As a vocalist, she studied privately and at Marietta College, where she earned a Vocal Performance Scholarship. Over the years, she has taken on roles as a singer, dancer, choreographer, and now actor. Sabrina is thrilled to be part of The Company at the Valley Gem for the 2024-2025 season. When she's not performing, she enjoys spending time with her fiancée, Candace, and their two pets, Nala and Bagheera. She also works as an affiliate marketer, substitute teacher, and wedding officiant.



## *What are your favorite shows or events you've performed on the boat?*

Love on Broadway was a blast because I love singing and dancing at the same time—it's my happy place! But A Tell-Tale Heart was extra special since it was my first-ever acting role. I mean, who wouldn't want their first acting gig to be Edgar Allan Poe? Creepy, dramatic, and over the top? Sign me up! It was such a cool challenge to take on something completely different.

## *What upcoming event would you most like to attend?*

I'd love to sit in on a trivia night as a guest—especially the themed ones like Marvel or Disney! It'd be fun to be on the other side and see if I could actually win.

## *What cruise are you most looking forward to in the 2025 season?*

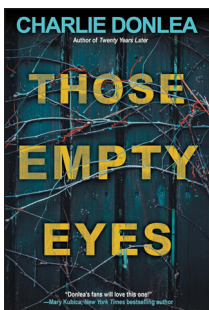
I cannot wait for A Season to Die For! A Regency-era murder mystery? Yes, please. I've always wanted to do a period piece, and the fact that it's a parody of a show I already love makes it even better. Plus, the Regency Ball is going to be a dream—I've always wanted to dress up in full historical attire!

## *What's your favorite food item on the boat?*

The mashed potatoes. No contest. I consider myself a bit of a potato connoisseur, and these are elite. I could eat them every single day.

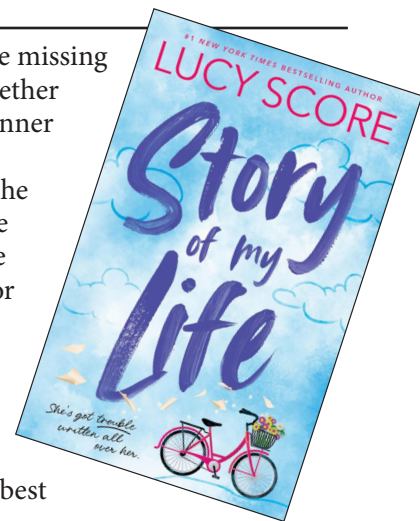
## *What makes performing on the boat unique compared to a traditional venue?*

Performing on the river adds a whole new level of magic—you're not just entertaining an audience, you're doing it with a stunning scenic backdrop. I grew up going on Valley Gem cruises, and now getting to perform on one is surreal. I also love how immersive our shows are. From the theme and décor to how we interact with the audience, every detail is about creating a fun experience. And honestly, our troupe is amazing. We genuinely have a great time together, and I think that energy makes every show feel special. It's never just another performance—it's an event I look forward to every time.



If you've never been to our Riviera Book Club, you are missing out. We have so much fun! Each month, we come together to read the book we've chosen and enjoy a surprise dinner that is somehow connected to the book or story. That might mean that there is food directly mentioned in the book or it's a play on words or regional cuisine... we've done it all. At the end of the dinner, we vote to choose the next month's book. Whether the books are good or bad, we have a blast talking about them and enjoying a wonderful meal by our Chef, Casandra Clark. Last month, we read "Those Empty Eyes" by Charlie Donlea. As a group, we unanimously gave it 4 stars. It was a good book with some unexpected twists. We enjoyed homemade Chicken and Dumplings for dinner along with apple cake the best ginger snap cookies ever.

Next month, our selected book is "Story of My Life" by Lucy Score. We will meet April 17 at 6pm. We will be stationary for April's event and begin cruising again in May!

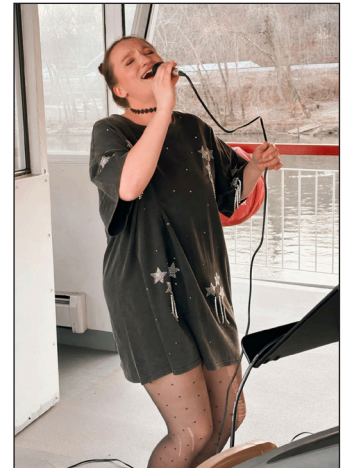


# April UPDATES:



## Music Cruises

Spring has sprung on the Ohio River, and guests enjoyed TOP DECK cruising at Journey Night for the first time since Fall, due to the recent warm weather! We are grateful for those who joined us on those warm days, and we are looking forward to more top deck entertainment in the months to come! We have more music headed your way this month, with events like Night Of Queen, Country Western Night, & Jazz On The River!



## Murder Mysteries

The actors from The Company have been working hard on our next murder mystery, with performances beginning in April! A Season To Die For: A Romantic Comedy Mystery plays aboard the Valley Gem and Major/Riviera for three dates only.



All's fair in love and murder.

"Courting season is upon us and this year is set to be more than memorable. The Viscountess Lavender Bridgton is throwing a gala to celebrate her daughter Daffodil's 1813 premiere season. In

attendance will be Stephen Hound, the Duke of Hasty, said to be courting the young Miss Bridgton—a fact that has been rumored to greatly displease his closest friend, Lady Daffodil's own brother, Tony. Saucy Featherly, arch rival and lifelong friend of Daffodil will also be in attendance with her eye rumored to be on young master Tony himself. Lord Nigel Ambrosia will be accompanied by his fresh black eye, delivered, they say, by the young Miss Bridgton. And, if the winds are fair, perchance I, Lady Thistledown might make an appearance."

Our newest Murder Mystery show opens soon with performances on April 5, April 26, and May 24.

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## Mixology



Spring has sprung! Attend April's Mixology Cruise aboard the Valley Gem Sternwheeler. Our resident Mixologist, Alex Lenzo, and our Head

Chef, Casandra Clark, have been mixing up something special to welcome spring to our popular Mixology river cruises and to your pallets! Enjoy making 3 different cocktails step-by-step with a menu item paired with each beverage. We'll be mixing spring, sweet flavors with your favorite spirits, such as vodka, bourbon, and gin. Get your tickets now for our next Mixology Cruise on April 18th from 6-8pm. Seating is limited, all guests must be 21+.

Google Review, 5 Stars - "My mom and I went to the Murder Mystery Dinner. The food was delicious. And the entertainment was lighthearted and fun. The river is beautiful. We enjoyed the evening." - Nikki D.

