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Waitsfield, VT 05673



Guide to Vermont Beer, Wine & Cheese & Specialty Foods

By Megan Schultz

For the last few decades the craft beer movement has been a slowly swelling wave, building momentum from the ambitious actions of craft brewing pioneers such as Jack McAuliffe, Fritz Maytag, Jim Koch and more. The movement crashed upon Vermont's shores in 1986 when Catamount Brewing opened its doors. While many breweries within the state have since come and gone, this remains certain: Vermont is a top craft beer destination and the Mad River Valley sits conveniently located right

(according to Ratebeer.com) sits up yonder in Greensboro. And of course award-winning brewer Sean Lawson of Lawson's Finest Liquids calls the Mad River Valley home sweet home. The state is packed with breweries cranking out craft beer like cows milking in a parlor.

"I think much of the success Vermont breweries are experiencing is due to the quality that our consumers demand," says Jen Kimmich, co-owner of The Alchemist from over the hill. "In general, Vermonters appreciate craft products that are made

have no dreams of becoming a large regional brewery. We simply want to be remain small and continue crafting small batches of Heady Topper."

Sean Lawson echoes this sentiment: "We are committed to our current location and quality of life that our small family-run business provides. We are currently at the maximum capacity and have no plans for a major expansion in the near future." In other words, if you want to fill your beer fridge with some of Vermont's best offerings, you'll have to head to the source. If



in the thick of it all.

The craft beer business is booming. Quality beers brewed 3,000 miles away are distributed nationally and readily available in gas stations right here in Vermont. Boston Beer Company continues to push the boundaries of what qualifies as a "craft brewery," selling over 2 million barrels of beer in 2012. Craft beer is becoming so popular that it's frequently advertised on TV and available on draught at chain restaurants like Applebee's. It turns out the mainstream American beer-drinking scene is finally cluing in to what Vermonters have known for quite a while: Craft beer tastes good.

Officially the Vermont state beverage is milk. The state boasts the largest number of cows per capita in the country. Vermont also has the largest number of craft breweries per capita in the country. The number-one ranked beer in the world (according to Beer Advocate) is brewed over the hill in Waterbury. The best brewery in the world

close to home. Because Vermont has such a large demographic that supports craft brewing and is willing to be adventurous with new flavors, brewers are able to push boundaries and experiment. Also, because Vermonters do recognize and appreciate well-crafted beer, brewers need to produce ales and lagers that are of the highest quality."

Just belly up to almost any local bar; the demand for quality local craft beers is such that you are likely to see a healthy list of Vermont brews – and not just your gas station varieties either. You're bound to find beer made within a 25-mile radius of your barstool, and you might well be sitting next to the guy who brewed it.

Most Vermont craft brewers run relatively small operations and are perfectly content to keep a short leash on their distribution. It gives them a lot more control of their product, but it also allows them to stay more connected to their communities.

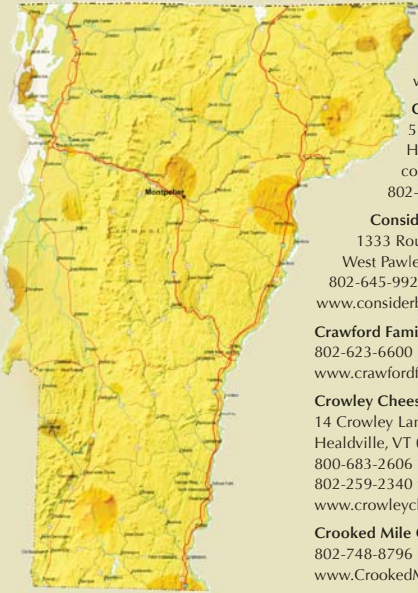
"It feels right for us," says Kimmich. "We

the beer will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the Green Mountains.

This has spawned a new type of tourism in Vermont: Beerccations. The "IPA Highway," as Kimmich calls it, is a well-traveled path on which visitors and Vermonters alike pack coolers in their cars and journey across our scenic countryside from one brewery to the next. Vermont Brewers Association (VBA) offers a "Passport Program" that encourages people to visit as many Vermont breweries as they can and awards Vermont beer prize packages to those who redeem stamped passports.

"Our Passport Program is huge," says Kurt Staudter, executive director of VBA. "We already have the number of passport redemptions now that we had at the end of October in 2012. What's really exciting is that brewers are experimenting and bringing back old styles of beer that haven't been seen in decades, that fell by the wayside because of the prevalence the of the pale in-

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Lawson's Finest Liquids grows in reputation, not size

"You can turn around, and that's the tour," Sean Lawson said, standing in the middle of his small one-room microbrewery, home of Lawson's Finest Liquids.

The coveted Warren-based beer cel-



brated its fifth anniversary this past April and while Lawson has updated his equipment since he first started brewing, "It's all in the same space, and it's still just me."

Lawson has one helper, Steve, who comes in once a week to help him bottle, but other than that Lawson's Finest Liquids is a one-man operation. "We're not even close with keeping up with demand. I just brew as much as I can," Lawson said of his beer, which sells out usually within the same day he delivers to local stores.

To expand, Lawson would have to move the operation away from his home. It's not something he's interested in doing while his daughters—ages 4 and 7—are still so young, "but eventually..." he said.

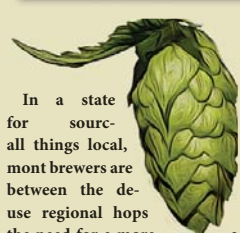
For now, Lawson is celebrating five years of brewing in The Valley and

is thankful for the strong word-of-mouth surrounding his beer and the ever-emerging craft brewing craze that has allowed his business to prosper.

For Lawson, brewing "used to be a full-time job with part-time pay," he said. Five years later, he's busier than ever, but he's starting to get more back.



Left: Sean and Karen Lawson. Photo: Lawson's Finest. Right: Sean Lawson at his Warren, VT, brewery. Photo: Rachel Goff.



In a state known for sourcing all things local, Vermont brewers are in the desert using regional hops and the need for a more consistent quality ingredient.

Once a major exporter of hops in the early 1800s, Vermont's hop industry

Locally sourced hops?

had all but disappeared by the 1900s, making it impossible for even smaller scale brewers to rely on in-state sources. Today, most of the hops in the United States come from the Pacific Northwest, but the Vermont Hops Project, an outreach and applied research program at the University of Vermont (UVM) extension, is looking for ways to once again increase hop production in the

Northeast. Currently, the Vermont Hops Project is working on discovering the most viable hop varieties for Vermont's climate and weather patterns. "Ultimately we hope to find cultivars that combine disease resistance, high yields and desirable brewing attributes," the program's UVM website reads. "We are also investigating various fertility and pest man-



agement strategies for organic hop production." For more information about the Vermont Hops Project visit their website at uvm.edu/extension/cropsoil/hops#vthops.

Off the beaten beer trail at Hill Farmstead Brewery

By Rachel Goff

Whether it's north to Switchback, west to Otter Creek or south to Long Trail, beer drinkers in The Valley and Vermont can drive in any direction and end up at a brewery.

In 2012, Vermont boasted more breweries per capita than any other state in the U.S., and they're all compiled on a neat little map made up by the Vermont Brewer's Association. This is why, soon after moving to The Valley, I found myself driving down quiet cow-lined lanes in the Northeast Kingdom, on my way to Hill

Farmstead Brewery in Greensboro.

Hill Farmstead Brewery is hard to find, and we found ourselves making multiple wrong turns down dirt roads before stopping to ask for directions at a general store. Inside, the woman working at the cash register pulled out a hand-drawn, photocopied map directing us towards the brewery. "This happens a lot," she said.

When we saw the small sign at the

side of the road, we knew we'd arrived at Hill Farmstead, but it wasn't until another car pulled up beside us and a man got out clutching two empty growlers that we figured out how to get inside.

True to its title, Hill Farmstead Brewery is located in a barn, and when we followed the man through an unmarked door along one wall we found ourselves facing a small bar and a surprisingly

large crowd of customers, who were standing around and sipping samples of the small-batch beer.

For all of its acclaim, the tasting room at Hill Farmstead is not at all pretentious. When I finished a sample, I rinsed my glass out with water, emptying it down a grate in the floor before handing it to the bartender to be refilled. The Vermont Brewer's Association has helped turn breweries into well-marked tourist destinations, but sometimes it's nice to have to stop to ask for directions and later dump your drink on the floor.



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Mad River Distillers now in production

By Lisa Loomis

Mad River Distillers at Cold Springs Farm in Warren is in production!

The new still that was imported from Germany and installed in June is operational and the company is currently producing rum, corn whiskey and bourbon.

Mad River Distillers will be producing corn whiskey, gin, bourbon and apple brandy in small casts. The liquor will be distributed through the state of Vermont's distribution system

and will be sold locally as well as at the distillery. Visitors to the distillery will be able to sample the products and view portions of the distillery.

The business is the brainchild of Brett Little and John Egan, both of Boston. The two partners, as well as their general manager Alex Hilton, hosted a well-attended Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce mixer earlier this summer and participated in the Taste of the Valley this week.

Egan said that the spirits will begin showing up on store shelves in September and that he and his partner just need to finish up some paperwork with Vermont liquor stores to make that happen.

Egan, who referred to himself as "the first John Egan" to differentiate himself from Sugarbush ski ambassador John Egan, and his wife Maura Connelly bought Cold Springs Farm about a decade ago and had given some thought to creating a vineyard on the property. Then they began to lean towards making apple brandy and in collaboration with Little came up with the idea for a distillery.

The liquor is being fermented on premises using locally sourced grains. Mad River Distillers is producing small casks which have been routed on the inside to increase the liquid-to-cask surface area ratio and decrease aging time from five to seven years to 18 months.

They will label and bottle the liquor themselves on site and are currently bottling their rum. The still was imported from Germany and arrived in Montreal in a shipping container last week. The shipping container made

its way on a flatbed truck from Montreal to Warren on Monday, June 3.

The distillery is located in a barn on the property that was renovated and expanded by Warren contractor Alex Hilton, and as the renovation progressed, his job expanded as well and he will be the general manager of the company.

Top: Bottles on display at Mad River Distillers. Inset: First Run Rum at the annual Taste of The Valley. Left: The still. Right: Specialized aging barrels at Mad River Distillers. Photos: Jeff Knight, John Atkinson, Mad River Distillers



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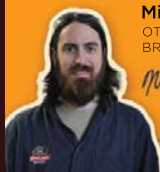


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Source: vermontwine.com

Klimek transitions from aerospace to grape growing



Photo courtesy Mad River Vineyards

By Lisa Loomis

Joe Klimek's enthusiasm for growing grapes is contagious. Klimek and his wife Carol have 1,200 vines planted in their Waitsfield vineyard on East Warren Road and the retired aerospace engineer brought his scientific mind and a passion for wine to his vineyard.

The Klimeks built their home on 50 acres of land on East Warren Road seven years ago. They planted their 1,200 grape vines on three acres five years ago.

The Klimeks are wine enthusiasts who have traveled extensively to study wine and vineyards and learn about the process in great depth.

"We hadn't planned on putting in a vineyard until we found out that a new strain of vine had been hybridized to withstand really cold temperatures. The

University of Minnesota developed a vine that could withstand these temperatures and I became very interested. We had enough property, we're interested in wine and we thought, why not try to grow these grapes?" Klimek said.

An important factor for Klimek was to plant a vineyard at a scale where everything could be done by hand. He didn't want to use automated machinery to tend to his vines and to harvest them. And he doesn't. He tends to the plants himself for the most part and when it's time to harvest he gets together friends and neighbors and community members to help with the harvest.

"This is our fifth year of growing, but you plant the vines and don't expect a harvest until the third year, more likely

Continued on Page 8

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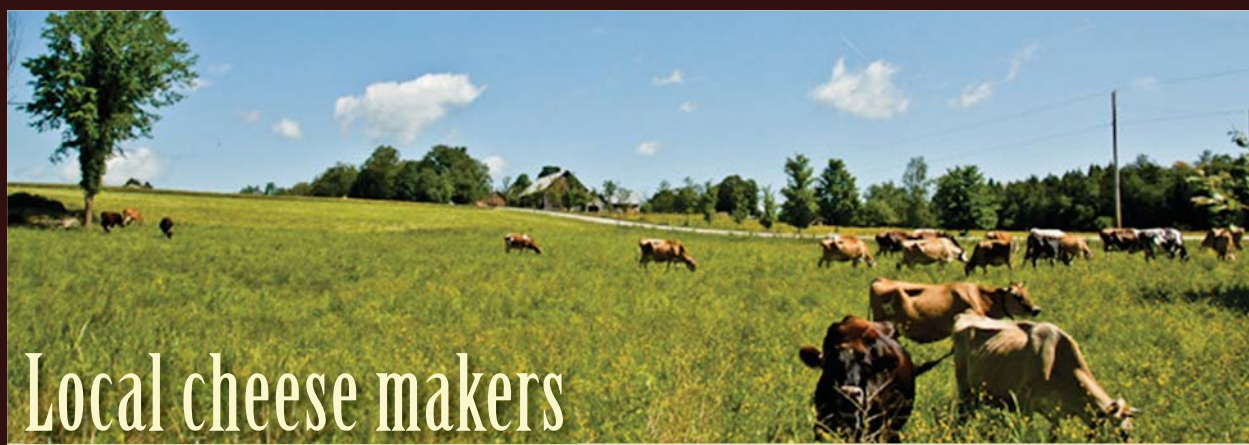
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Local cheese makers

By Rachel Goff

“We’ve got small fields clumped in rolling hills,” Sebastian von Trapp said, describing the family farm. In The Valley, “the landscape isn’t conducive to large dairy,” von Trapp said, so some small farmers have switched their focus to creating a value-added product: cheese.

While Vermont is known for the Cabot Creamery Cooperative, The Valley itself is home to von Trapp Farmstead Cheese in Waitsfield and Three Shepherds Cheese in Warren, both whose products have garnered considerable acclaim despite their limited distribution.

Some Valley cheese, such as the von Trapp’s Oma, is sold throughout the state and the rest of New England, while others are only available in town. At Three Shepherds, “We used to sell our food all over the country and we discovered that we didn’t like shipping,” owner Linda Faillace said. Now, “Everything we make we sell at the Waitsfield Farmers’ Market and a few local places,” she said.

Three Shepherds’ farmers’ market success speaks to The Valley’s strong

localvore movement, and the same is true for von Trapp Farmstead Cheese. “There are people who are interested in what we’re doing and support our agriculture,” von Trapp said.

Von Trapp Farmstead has 40 to 50 cows on about 60 acres of pasture, and von Trapp and his three full-time employees make the cheese in a facility connected to the dairy barn and age it on site (with the exception of Oma, which is aged at the Cellars at Jasper Hill).

Von Trapp Farmstead Cheese includes four varieties: two softer cheeses, a goat cheese, and a hard alpine-style cheese. “They’re all different styles and different ages,” von Trapp said. “The common thread is we’re using the same high quality certified organic milk.”

At Three Shepherds, on the other hand, “We work with all different milk,” Faillace said, explaining that they buy their main ingredient. Three Shepherds makes up to 15 different varieties of cheese, from fresh mozzarella and ricotta to aged gouda, but right now “we’re only making a few thousand pounds of cheese a year,”

Faillace said.

In recent years, the family company has scaled back on production in order to teach more cheese making classes. In addition to teaching classes in Warren, Three Shepherds Cheese travels all over the country—and world—sharing their recipes. “We get paid to go to Belize [to teach] twice a year,” Faillace said, “so we must be doing something right.”

As Three Shepherds has scaled back on production, another farm in Warren has increased its output. La Lu Farm, a 48-acre Lincoln Gap Road property owned by husband and wife team Constancia Gomez and Kevin Richie, is not yet certified to sell its goats’ milk cheese in restaurants or stores. Instead, the farm sells directly to customers through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model.

La Lu Farm started five years ago with just three goats, which “we got to keep the brush down,” Richie said. Now, the farm has 34 goats and produces close to 100 pounds of cheese per month, in varieties such as chevre, mozzarella and queso blanco. Right now, Richie makes the cheese right in

the couple’s kitchen, but as he works to make La Lu a certified dairy farm, the couple is also working on building a separate cheese making facility.

As far as customers for their cheese, “It’s basically word of mouth,” Gomez said, proving that The Valley has proved a nurturing environment for local, food-based businesses both big and small.



Top: Cows grazing free at von Trapp Farmstead in Waitsfield, VT. Below: Making the first batch of cheese at von Trapp’s. Photos courtesy von Trapp Farmstead

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Aerospace wine

Continued from Page 6

the fourth year. Each year the vines get stronger and stronger and produce more until one vine can produce 10 to 15 pounds of grapes, so we can expect to hit about 15,000 pounds of grapes," he said.

Klimek is really well versed in wine and when asked how many bottles of wine his grapes could create, he readily provided the answer.

"It takes about three and one-half pounds of grapes to make a single bottle of wine so our crop equals 3,000 to 4,000 bottles of wine," he explained.

The Klimeks sell their grapes to other Vermont wineries right now but are interested in creating a boutique winery on their property. To that end, Joe already has a lab in his basement and some of the basic

winemaking equipment.

Vermont grapes are very much in demand from Vermont wineries, and their grape, the Marquette, is no exception.

Klimek's passion for wine is not limited to growing grapes, drinking wine or being active in the Vermont Grape and Wine Counsel; he also consults with people on planting their own vineyards.

The grapes are harvested in the

fall when their sugar content hits 24



Joe Klimek, left, and friends after a 2011 harvest. Photo: Mad River Vineyard.

percent. Klimek has a piece of handheld field equipment that he uses to test the sugar of the grapes to determine when to harvest. The grapes are

currently green and as soon as they change color from green to purple (a process known as "veraison," which means in transition from green to purple because their sugar levels are increasing) he begins testing them. They change color at 15 percent sugar.

Klimek handworks the vines, removing foliage as needed to encourage the sugar increase in the grapes, and he is helped three or four times a year by his vineyard partner Tom Golodik.

Klimek will be conducting a vineyard educational tour on August 17 and 18 that will be open to the public. There will be two sessions each day at 1 and 3 p.m. All vineyards and wineries in Vermont will be conducting similar open houses or tours.

Stay for the beer

Continued from Page 1

dustrial lager. Now we have lots and lots of Vermont breweries resurrecting these wonderful styles and giving people more beers to try."

But, as the locals will tell you, "This is Vermont; you can't get there from here." It takes a stout three and a half hours to drive from the state's furthest north to furthest south breweries, and that's only if you don't stop at any of the dozens of breweries in between. Trekking around the state on a craft beer treasure hunt is great way to spend a weekend or two. But it can be a challenge to visit everything you want to see even in the best of weather, and as the number of breweries

rises in the state (it's some paperwork away from 34) making a regular habit of these trips can be daunting even for the most enthusiastic of beer geeks.

Enter: Beer fests.

Beer is the laidback, zip-hoodie wearing cousin of wine. It lends itself well to camaraderie and light-hearted celebrations so it's no surprise that beer fests have become popular. Not only are they the closest thing to the mountain coming to Muhammad that the Vermont craft beer scene can offer, a great beer fest can be like a really fun backyard party with you, a couple dozen brewers and several hundred of your closest friends. Beer

geeks of all levels get a chance to try something new, try favorites head to head and geek-out with fellow aficionados in a cool, laidback atmosphere and even leave with a souvenir T-shirt and tasting glass to prove it.

Our valley is lucky to have two beer fests bookending our summer, starting in the spring with Sugarbush's Brew Grass Fest and then in the fall with Siptemberfest held at Mad River Glen. (Shameless plug for my beer fest: September 27 and 28 - go to siptemberfest.com for more info!) Our valley is also full of restaurants and watering holes serving local brews as fresh as they get. This

plus our proximity to beer-greatness makes the Mad River Valley an ideal craft beer destination for locals, beer-cationers and zip-hoodie-wearing festivalgoers alike.

"It's an amazing time to be a beer drinker," says Stauder. With that beer movement showing no signs of receding, the state of the Vermont craft beer scene is likely to continue on strong, as Lawson says on every bottle, "Straight from the Green Mountains to your head!"

Megan Schultz is a local event planner, social media fan and beer geek. Find her on Facebook, Twitter and megsevents.com

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