Parish Brewing Co.

Lafayette beer maker taps BR, N.O. markets

BY TIMOTHY BOONE
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BROUSSARD — Andrew Godley jokes that it was "an epiphany at Olive Garden" that led him to open Parish Brewing Co., which has seen strong sales and acclaim for its craft beers.

About six or seven years ago, Godley was out to dinner at the chain restaurant with his eventual wife and dealing with the limited beer menu.

"I was sitting around an Olive Garden, drinking crappy beer, thinking this is not possibly the best Louisiana has to offer," said Godley, 32, sitting in the Parish Brewing offices with a snifter glass of beer at his desk. "I remember telling my wife, I'm going to start a brewery, this is what I need to do."

Today, Parish Brewing is producing between 2,000 and 4,000 gallons a week of its flagship Canebrake beer to sell on tap at bars and restaurants across south Louisiana.

The company moved into a new brewery in Broussard in early 2012 that greatly expanded its capacity to make beer. That allowed Canebrake to expand out of Lafayette and to be distributed in Baton Rouge, New Orleans and the Northshore.

It just takes one sip to understand why Canebrake has caught on with beer drinkers. It's a smooth, easy drinking beer. Gallaspy was looking at the microbes because Parish Brewing is thinking about making its own sour Belgian beer.

Brenton Day, of Baton Rouge, has a beer blog called "The Ale Runner." He said Godley has established a reputation for quality and care. "They're not going to release something until it is a quality, quality beer," said Day. "Andrew won't put a beer out there just to have a beer out there."

Godley graduated from Baton Rouge Magnet High and earned a degree in chemical engineering from LSU in 2002. After graduation, he helped build and operate plants that manufactured commodity chemicals, working in Pittsburgh and Lafayette. He learned how to run chemical and manufacturing processes.

Godley started Parish Brewing in a 1,200-square-foot shop in back of another shop in Broussard. Godley said he did things in an unorthodox way because it was cheap.

"It was stuff that nobody who's brewed in a professional way would ever think to do," he said.

Gallaspy, who worked as a commercial brewer across the U.S. for six years before joining the Parish Brewing staff in 2011, jokes that the first time he saw what Godley had rigged up he thought: "That isn't going to work."

Despite the handmade equipment, Parish Brewing was cranking out 16 kegs a week of Canebrake. Godley was still working as a chemical engineer at the Barley Oak with Steen's Cane Syrup.

"No other microbrew moves that much," she said.

Parish Brewing Co. employees Daniel Northcutt, left, and Phillip Lopez clean out a fermenter Wednesday at the Broussard Brewery.

At first glance, the Parish Brewing brewery doesn't look like much. It's in a nondescript metal building in an industrial park surrounded by oilfield service companies. Inside, the brewery had a clubhouse feel. The jazz-funk of Trombone Shorty was playing loudly, drowning out the constant patter of rain on the metal roof. A partially eaten pizza sat on a coffee table away from the brewing equipment, near a disc golf target basket. Stickers from microbreweries all over the U.S. were slapped on a forklift.

But the six-person staff at Parish Brewing takes its beer seriously. Godley stresses quality and innovation and hires people who share his passion.

"We're always trying other people's beer around here," said Will Gallaspy, a brewer, as he looked through a microscope to examine the mix of microbes in a sour Belgian beer.

Godley said the whole time he was looking for an opportunity to do something enterprising.

"It wasn't necessarily about money, but finding something I felt passionate about," he said.

Brewing beer was the answer. Godley was a burgeoning beer nerd and he had the background in chemical engineering to produce beverages.

"If you can manufacture these commodity chemicals at a very high quality matter, brewing is just a different type of science and process. The manufacturing principles are all the same," he said. Around 2005 to 2006, Godley jumped into making beer. He had never brewed beer before but was trying to do it on a commercial scale. It took him until 2009 to perfect his recipe enough to make Parish Brewing a limited liability company.

"The best learning experience was just the experience of doing it, making beer, tasting it, which isn't such a bad deal," he said.

Godley started Parish Brewing in a 1,200-square-foot shop in back of another shop in Broussard. He built all of the brewing equipment by hand, buying supplies off the Internet, hacking them up and repurposing them to make beer.

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cal engineer, so he was putting in 70 to 80 hours of work a week. Sometimes he would show up at 4 a.m. to start brewing beer and not leave until midnight. In his free time, he would peddle the beer to bars and restaurants in Lafayette.

That single-minded dedication to one beer honed Godley's brewing skills. Parish Brewing has made Canebrake so many times that the company has the "brewing IQ" of a larger company.

"We've brewed Canebrake since 2009, I think we've brewed it 300 times," he said. "You do something for 300 times, you know every little thing about the process, every little ingredient."

While Godley enjoyed making beer, the small brewery couldn't produce enough high quality beer to meet local demand, let alone take care of other things like cover the cost of expenses or pay him the semblance of a wage.

"If we didn't manage to put together the financial investment and financing deal to build this bigger facility, I would have quit, as much as I loved it," he said. "It was just too hard."

When the larger brewery opened last year, it allowed Parish Brewing to enter new markets that had been demanding Canebrake and start bottling beer for sale at stores in Lafayette.

Demand for Canebrake bottles is so great that the brewery can't make enough to sell bottled beer in other markets. Godley said he is committed to meeting demand in the core Lafayette market.

"We've been kind of bottled necked by our packaging equipment," he said. "We've only been bottling beer for seven or eight months; we're starting to get our guys more trained up."

Plans are to start selling bottles of Canebrake in Baton Rouge as soon as March, and move into New Orleans and the Northshore shortly after that.

Along with making more beer, the new brewery has allowed Parish Brewing to start making more than just Canebrake. In November, the brewery introduced Grand Reserve, a smooth barleywine that had been bottle-aged.

Production of Grand Reserve was limited to 1,300 bottles. Godley thought the beverage wouldn't be that popular, since it was 11 percent alcohol (more than double what is found in Canebrake) and it had a rich, complex taste.

But Grand Reserve flew off store shelves. The day it was released, Baton Rouge beer fans posted on social media and message boards information about what grocery and liquor stores had the product.

"There was just a frenzy of activity," Day said.

Some stores sold out of their bottles in just a few minutes. Godley said the response to Grand Reserve inflated his ego in a good way.

"It gives us confidence to not make more boring beer," he said. "We're going to make stuff people want and do it in a high quality way."

Parish Brewing's next beverage will be a Farmhouse IPA, made with Belgian yeast and delicate hops. It has a light, effervescent summery flavor, which is appropriate, since the plan is to release the IPA by April.

Godley expects Parish Brewing to "easily double, probably triple" its 2012 sales this year.

He wouldn't discuss revenue, but said his company defiantly turned a profit in 2012, which was significant. The expectation is that sales will increase by 50 to 100 percent over the next five or six years, based on demand from new markets.

Godley said he can't produce enough to ship kegs to local markets that have shown interest in carrying the beer, like Lake Charles, Houma and Alexandria, much less to large cities like Houston or Dallas.

"Our problem is not selling beer, our problem is making beer," he said. "We just need to make more in a high quality way. That's the challenge."

That's led to the question of how much and how fast Parish Brewing wants to expand. For Godley, it all comes back to the company's focus on quality.

"We let other people do it, nobody will care for my beer like I do," he said. "I would rather produce less and make sure that the quality is perfect."