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## New Bottles, Old Values

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## The Comeback



# New Bottles, Old Values

**COMING BACK TO GREENVILLE? WE TAKE A TOUR OF THE CITY'S CRAFT BEER MOVEMENT AND FIND SOMETHING THAT CAN'T BE BOTTLED AT ALL.**

BY LINDSAY NIEDRINGHAUS '07

**It's really not about the beer. Though they'll never admit that.** They'll say it's about the citrus notes or the malty backbone, the grain roast or the smooth finish, the pumpkin and coffee stouts in the winter and IPAs and saisons in the spring. When beers are served to them in stemmed glasses, they'll swirl and sniff, commenting on the head and consistency. And when they take a sip and breathe out slowly, all will be right in the world. But something else is happening when the beer hits their lips—something besides tasting the hops or feeling the effervescence. Life slows down.

**I**n 2007, South Carolina brewers, led by Jaime Tenny, co-owner of Coast Brewing in North Charleston and president of the South Carolina Brewers Association, lobbied for a law that would allow brewers to create their beers with a higher alcohol content than five percent. They won, raising the maximum alcohol content to 17 percent, and craft beer exploded in South Carolina.

Then, in May 2014, the state passed another law that allowed breweries to serve food on-site and lifted the cap on the quantity of beer produced. The hope was that this would encourage the growth of South Carolina's craft breweries and attract out-of-state breweries into the state.

It worked.

What the laws also did was allow for a new experience to be born. One in which over-21-somethings put down their phones for a few hours to catch up, where co-workers laughed about the day's annoyances, and friends learned something about each other.

This was the experience that places like The Community Tap in downtown Greenville intended and perfected.

Mike Okupinski, co-owner with Ed Buffington of the Tap, says, "When Ed and I opened our store, we took a long time discussing the name. Above all else, we wanted it to have a neighborhood feel."

Walkable from the North Main neighborhood, the Tap has become the local gathering place for beer and wine lovers in Greenville. The business itself is a family one.

Okupinski's wife works at the Tap, and Buffington's fa-



#### THE NEXT GENERATION

Furman alumnus Edward Westbrook is on the vanguard of creating beers that push the definition of what beer can be.

ther-in-law and Okupinski's dad contributed to the construction of the space, made from 100-year-old wood that came from a mill in Anderson County. With family being such a central part of their lives, they always envisioned that the Tap would be family-friendly.

On a nice afternoon, it's typical to find couples, children, cycling teams, and co-workers sitting outside at the long family-style picnic tables situated under the old hardware sign original to the space. They're enjoying craft beer and wine, but they're also munching on local pimiento cheese and crackers sold inside. The kids are playing one of the board games available, and the chocolate lab gets a spare pretzel every now and then when the toddler decides to drop one under the table.

Okupinski laughs about a time several years ago when a winter storm came to Greenville.

"Everything was closed—even the grocery store—but we were open. And we were slammed! Everybody in North Main just walked over to the store. I think they were excited to have a diversion from sitting in their houses all day. I have never seen so many dogs and strollers in here all at once."

In addition to the North Main area, Okupinski says they also chose the location because of the large parking lot out front that was perfect for food trucks.

"It's almost assumed that foodies are also going to love good beer and wine," says Okupinski. "The two go hand in hand."

Food trucks have popped up all over Greenville in the past few years, and some of the favorites park at the Tap regularly. Patrons can grab a taco from Asada or a burger from the Chuck Truck, then bring it inside the Tap, where Buffington and Okupinski are ready to pair it with a great beer or wine.

**"WHEN ED AND I OPENED OUR STORE, WE TOOK A LONG TIME DISCUSSING THE NAME. ABOVE ALL ELSE, WE WANTED IT TO HAVE A NEIGHBORHOOD FEEL."**

—MIKE OKUPINSKI, CO-OWNER OF THE COMMUNITY TAP

## The Comeback



### TAPPED IN

Perhaps the biggest pleasure of the craft beer movement is how it returns old-fashioned socializing to an otherwise fragmented society. On this recent Friday afternoon, customers begin to gather at The Community Tap.

The two owners, who both worked desk jobs before their current gig, reflect on the short four years they've been open.

"We had an uncommonly good first year. It showed us Greenville was ready for a place like this—a place where people could relax, unwind, and enjoy a good beer or glass of wine."

Barley's Taproom and Pizzeria has long been known as the original headquarters for good

beer in Greenville. Opened in 1996 off Main Street, within a 19th-century hardware and feed store, the restaurant offers 72 craft beers on tap and more than 200 bottled beers.

Owner Josh Beeby, who has supported Tenny in her lobbying efforts on behalf of craft beer, is well known and respected among local beer connoisseurs. They credit him with bringing the craft beer scene to Greenville.

Barley's remains a major draw in the local restaurant scene for more than its beer, too. Nearly every evening around 5:30, families can be seen gathering around for weekday pizzas, or to create personalized slices—always with a side of garlic knots, one of the restaurant's most popular creations.

Tucked away down an alley around the corner from Barley's is The Greenville Beer Exchange, whose unassuming presence reveals little about the world of beers that waits inside.

With more than 1,200 beers from around the United States and the world, it's easy to become overwhelmed with options.

"We sell just about everything here," says co-manager Andrew Farmer. "Though our largest selection is local beer."

On a recent Tuesday, a 30-something customer sporting Converse All-Stars and a T-shirt frayed at the neck with too many washings approaches Farmer holding a bottle.

"This is my favorite beer, but it's like \$25. Can you tell me what's similar to it but costs about half the price? I'm on a budget."

In 30 seconds, Farmer has pulled two different options for the customer, explaining the nuances in the different tastes.

Meanwhile, two guys walk in holding growlers. It's almost 5 p.m., which means the Beer Exchange is poised to offer an interesting, sometimes experimental keg of beer from a brewery. Also known as Rare Beer Tuesday, the event brings regulars who are always ready to try something new.

**SIMILAR TO THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT...CRAFT BEER STORES ARE ENCOURAGING PATRONS TO VALUE QUALITY OVER QUANTITY, LONG-TERM OVER SHORT-TERM GAINS.**

Guy on a Budget begins talking to Guys with Growlers, and before you know it, they're like old friends who haven't seen each other in years. Farmer smiles.

"This is a friendly industry," he says. "We get people from all walks of life in here, and we all like talking about beer—it's what we have in common."

One popular line of craft beers at The Beer Exchange comes from Westbrook Brewing Co., founded by **Edward Westbrook '07** and based in Charleston, South Carolina.

No-nonsense and introspective, Westbrook describes the inspiration for his craft brewery business simply:

"I went to Europe in the fall of 2005 on a study away trip. I tried a Guinness. It was the first beer I tasted that had flavor. I was intrigued. I started brewing on the stove, and after several years of that, my wife and I decided to make a business out of it."

Though Westbrook may be a man of few words, his flavorful creations inspire many. With the mission to "make the most interesting, drinkable, and generally awesome beer possible," the brewery is known for its unique combinations of ingredients.

"We like to experiment with different flavors," he explains. "For instance, the idea for White Thai came from the thought that Asian spices might work well in a wheat beer. Other times we'll brew a beer just to learn more about a certain ingredient, like a new hop variety."

Westbrook Brewing is also making a name for itself with the revival of a classic German sour wheat beer—the Gose.

Seasoned with salt and coriander, the Gose style had been slowly declining in popularity until some brewers recently began experimenting with it again.



## INNOVATIVE

Whether experimenting with new flavors, such as Asian spices, or resuscitating old classics, like the Gose, the craft beer movement is finding new ways to enjoy a pint.

Westbrook explains, "While we definitely weren't the first U.S. brewery to make a Gose, I think that our decision to put it in six-pack cans in July 2013 and distribute it in significant quantities made it much more accessible to a wide audience. Now more breweries are doing canned sour beers."

Okupinski of the Tap is amazed at Westbrook's influence on the industry.

"Sometimes Ed and I will say to ourselves, 'Wow. What would it feel like to know you're responsible for bringing a beer back into popularity?' What Ed [Westbrook] did was incredible for the industry."

The beers that Westbrook and others are producing may indeed be incredible, but the more striking byproduct of their work, and the movement itself, is what that work summons.

In a world where you're more likely to learn about your sister's engagement from Facebook than from her phone call, where every little "I wonder" is answered by a Google search, where multitasking has really become just "tasking," it's easy for our norms to shift to a harried approach to life. The cottage industry of craft beer is a response to this proliferation of technology and impersonality.

Similar to the Slow Food movement that supports local ingredients and sustainable practices, craft beer stores are encouraging both patrons and breweries to appreciate local businesses and value quality over quantity, long-term over short-term gains.

In the end, there is something refreshingly simple about gathering together for a beer.

No hidden agenda, no schedule, no pressure.

It's a return to conversation, to playing peekaboo with a nephew, to scratching a dog behind his ears. It's a return to the physical, the actual. A return to life. **F**

## The Checklist

### Barley's Taproom and Pizzeria

25 West Washington Street  
864.232.3706  
barleysville.com

### The Community Tap

217 Wade Hampton Boulevard  
864.631.2525  
thecommunitytap.com

### The Greenville Beer Exchange

7 South Laurens Street  
864.232.3533  
greenvillebeerexchange.com