

Yalobusha Brewing Company impacts the art community

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The Yalobusha Brewing Company has several of their crafted beer on tap in many bars on the Oxford Square. In this picture the Copperhead, River Ale and a limited release beer are featured. (Photo: Hill Ray)

By Hill Ray

WATER VALLEY, Miss. — Tiny particles of grain and yeast fill the air, as three gigantic tanks stand tall brewing some of North Mississippi's finest craft beers. The Yalobusha Brewing Company, just outside of Oxford in Water Valley, Mississippi, has been making craft beer for under two years and is already distributing across the Southeast.

"To this day, everything I have done is about filling a need for a product or service that is not offered in this area," said Andy O'Bryan, owner of the Yalobusha Brewing Company.

Bars in big cities like New Orleans are big sellers of Yalobusha beer, but Oxford is where the brewery is making the strongest impact in the art community. The Yalobusha Brewing Company is the only brewery from Jackson, Mississippi, to Memphis, Tennessee, however O'Bryan said he sells more beer in New Orleans than all of Mississippi combined.

At the age of 34, O'Bryan has owned 19 businesses, but his present ownership is one that he will hold on to for many years to come. O'Bryan has looked up to people who owned businesses all his life. He grew up with this inspiration from his father, who was also a businessman.

O'Bryan and his master brewers, Tony Balzola and Amos Harvey, have seen nothing but success so far. Through their time testing recipes they have created several different craft beers. They consistently having four beers year-round and try out different ideas throughout the seasons. The brewery has crafted popular beers such as "River Ale," which is an American pale ale, and "Copperhead Amber Ale," which is an American amber red ale.

The beer is first sampled by employees and then by people that come in to tour the brewery. When people try his beers, O'Bryan said it gives him a better understanding of what people like. During the tour of the brewery, visitors can learn the process of brewing craft beer. As people walk through the brewery, they can see the huge tanks that are used to cook the ingredients.



(<https://oxfordmississippin.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/brewing-equipment.jpg>).

Malted barley and hops are placed in boiling water temperatures until sugars are formed. The water is then cooled down to 65 degrees before the yeast is added. The yeast then eats through the sugars, which creates the carbonation and the alcohol. Last, the beer is cooled down to 35 degrees before it is pumped into kegs. (Courtesy: Yalobusha Brewery)

Out of all the small businesses he has owned, O'Bryan knew that the brewery was something he wanted to do long term. "This is what I am going to do from now on. I am a little too old to be running two or three businesses at a time," said O'Bryan. "So I sold everything else I had just to focus on the brewery."

O'Bryan traveled the country, touring different breweries and meeting as many people as possible to get any kind of advice he could about brewing. Once he gathered enough knowledge about the brewing process, O'Bryan decided that he wanted to open a brewery near his home in Greenwood, Mississippi. O'Bryan attended The University of Mississippi, and now his family lives in Oxford.

Brewing beer can be a lengthy process for O'Bryan and his crew, but they still find the time to give back to the community. The Yalobusha Brewing Company distributes crafted beer all over the regional South. The square in Oxford has several bars where Yalobusha beer is served, and bartenders have witnessed the popularity of the local beer firsthand.

"I highly recommend our local crafted beer, because it's a great beer, and it is also nice to support our



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Yalobusha beer, along with others, are being delivered to The Blind Pig on the Oxford Square by the keg. As of now, the Yalobusha Brewery only distributes their beer in kegs, but O'Bryan said they will be bottling beer soon. (Photo: Hill Ray)

local brewery," said Joseph Stinchcomb, bartender at Proud Larry's.

Stinchcomb said people from out of town always ask for Mississippi beer, and he usually recommends whatever Yalobusha has on tap. Then he tells customers, "this is as close to local as you'll get."

"We always have at least three of their beers on tap," said Colton Baker, bartender at The Growler. "Each beer has it's own variety of taste, which is good for our costumers." Baker said.

Baker said Yalobusha beers are a popular beer for travelers, but also for the locals.

O'Bryan's said his brewery means more than just making quality beer. It's also about helping his community. "It's important to me to be balanced, community-minded, to be charitable in causes we believe in and to make quality beer," O'Bryan said.

O'Bryan said the Yalobusha Brewing Company participates in every non-profit beer fest in the state. As company policy, they do not participate in profitable beer festivals. O'Bryan said his brewery participates in charity events like Miss-I-Sippin, which benefits the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council and the UM Department of Nutrition and Hospitality Management. These events also benefit the Mississippi Brewers Guilds, which is helping all the breweries in Mississippi.

O'Bryan said his goal is to get his beer distributed in every state in the South Eastern Conference, and to eventually ship his beer overseas. Because of his success, O'Bryan said that he will have to hold off on signing with anymore businesses until he can produce more beer.

O'Bryan said there are even people in Europe looking to sign with Yalobusha, but until they can hire more staff and buy more tanks, they will not be able to sign with anyone else.

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