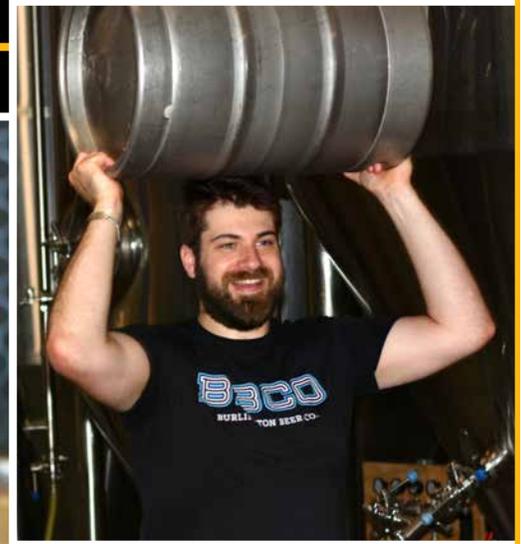


BBCO

BURLINGTON BEER CO.

Where Fermentation Meets Imagination



Williston, VT

Producer OF THE Month

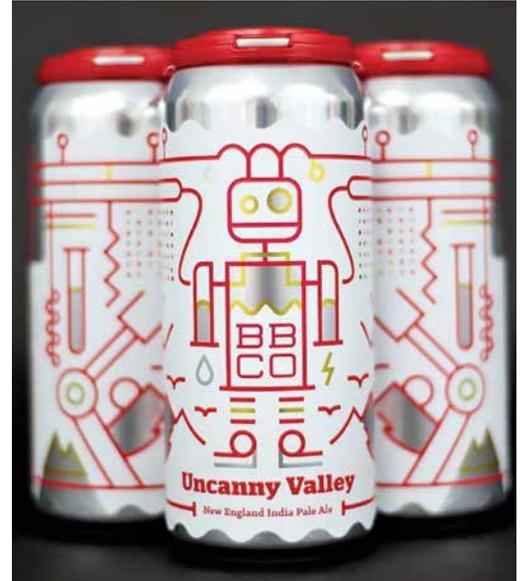
AUGUST 2020



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE *Month*

by Jon Megas-Russell



Beer brewing and its recipes were first noted on scrolls dating as far back as 5000 BC. The process and flavors progressed during the Middle Ages throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia up to the present day. From the ancient Egyptians to medieval monks and through U.S. Prohibition, beer has long been revered as a delicious and refreshing beverage. We are fortunate at the Co-op to have an expansive and excellent selection of beers with a focus on Vermont breweries. Many of these harken back to old recipes that have been brewed for thousands of years, while others bring forth new and unimaginable creations. One of the leaders pushing the limits on the Vermont beer scene is Burlington Beer Company.

The Williston, VT-based and independently-owned Burlington Beer Company has a slew of delicious beers that tickle your taste buds and assist in a merry time on a warm summer evening. Their founder, owner, CEO, and COO Joe

Lemnah has years of experience and hundreds of brews under his belt, and loves to match his imagination with fermentation in every batch of beer that is brewed. In just six years they have progressed from brewing 600 gallons on a “Frankenstein,” built-on-site electric brewhouse to having a state-of-the-art brewing facility with a steam jacketed 30 bbl (barrel) brewhouse. They have the capacity to brew thousands of gallons each week with a growing distribution, and co-ops are a large part of their success.

Joe was born in Burlington, VT in 1982 and grew up in Essex Junction, VT, graduating from Essex High School in 2000. Joe started his love affair with beer when drinking early craft beers like Magic Hat, Long Trail, Otter Creek, and Trout River. After a few semesters of college and finding out it was not a good fit, he dropped out and took a cross country trip to visit many breweries across the country. Joe made his first batch of homebrew in September of 2006 and went on to homebrew

more than 200 batches on top of brewing professionally. Between 2006 and 2012, Joe was a brewer at Olde Saratoga Brewing Co., Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, and Evolution Craft Brewing Co., working his way up from the packaging line at Olde Saratoga to Assistant Brewmaster at Evolution Brewing Co. Now many of his original homebrew batches and recipes are now used at Burlington Beer Company. Overall, Joe started Burlington Beer Co. with more than 10,000 hours of professional brewing experience. He now has a family with a wife and two kids and dreams that his children may one day work at the brewery.

As BBCO states on their website:





“We strive to find balance between going too far and staying rooted in tradition,” and one of their core statements is, “Where fermentation meets imagination.” These philosophies hold true every time you peek into the cooler and find a beer that has unique flavors and characteristics. While I wrote this article, I perused BBCO’s many offerings and found three beers that depict the wild side of their approach. First an IPA, Double Seaside Pirates, brewed with pancakes, milk sugar, vanilla and a bold amount of raspberry. Second, You Can’t Get There from Here, a sour and salty Gose-style beer complete with the flavors of lime and kumquat. Third, Strawberry Whale Cake, a cream ale with strawberries that begs you to wonder where they come up with these recipes,



names and can designs. Joe himself did not think many years ago while brewing at Dogfish Head that beers would become so expansive. For instance, lactose sugar was only used in milk stouts, and no one ever dreamed that it would find its way into so many beers. Right now the imagination that is coming forward during their brewing process sets BBCO apart and on the cutting edge of Vermont’s big, juicy, sweet beers. However, these three particular selections do not encapsulate their whole approach—they brew upwards of 75 beers per year. This includes Pale Ales, IPA’s, Double IPA’s, Triple IPA’s, Goses, Sours, Brown Ales, Porters, Oatmeal Stouts, Double Stouts, and Barrel Aged Imperial Stouts, among other experiments. Each of their beers has a mind-melting name and inspired artwork to match.

Their flagship beers include Elaborate Metaphor, a New England-style Pale Ale brewed with Citra hops, Amarillo hops, barley, flaked oats, wheat, and raw wheat. It’s Complicated Being a Wizard is a Double IPA and has a radiant straw-orange glow brewed with massive quantities

of hops for a bold hop flavor. Utilizing barley, wheat malt, and flaked oats in the grist bill (the grain part of a beer’s recipe) for a soft malt character. A neat side note on Wizard is that that this beer was named after the band Portugal. The Man’s self-titled 2007 album. Their last flagship beer is Uncanny Valley, an IPA brewed with Mosaic hops, Citra hops, ripe mango, pine needles, watermelon, and stone fruit. The hop flavors wash over a balanced malt bill to hold up the bold hops. Try one or many of these beers. Please note that all of them are subject to availability, and when they arrive oftentimes sell quite rapidly. We hope that the beers we feature in this article are available but often we can only obtain a limited number of cans, and so we welcome you to try any of their delicious creations that you encounter in our coolers.

The inspired artwork on the cans, which they loosely call “line art,” dates back to one of Joe’s high school friends. As Joe began to brew beer for Burlington Beer Company and needed images for his cans, he reflected on how much he enjoyed that style, and had Tim Fealey,



now his Creative Director, riff on that original idea to come up with what you see today. Every can was intended to pique people's curiosity and beg them to interact with the cans by taking an up-close look to identify the type of beer and the design. When Joe first started BBCO he felt that many people over time would truly identify this unique art as it was far different from anything being released in Vermont. Personally, I love the art for Creatures of Magic, which features a mysterious undersea animal. And I agree with Joe when he said that as their popularity has grown the "aesthetic has seeped into people's minds."

The mission and vision of BBCO comes from focusing on community, people and quality before profits. For instance, they are very aggressive with how they pay employees and offer a great benefits package that they believe allows them to maintain the best possible team. They try to invest in professional development whenever possible and have sent all the brewers to brewing school, which was good for the quality of beer and retention of staff. While they are not B Corp-certified, they are seeking to move in that direction with work on how they codify their mission, vision and legal language. They also want to give more back to the community through projects

like their recently brewed beer called Vaulted Blue; 5% of sales from this beer go directly to the Green Mountain Club, an organization that supports Vermont hiking trails and mountains. Joe could not have been clearer about the fact that he believes that he must use his success to grow great jobs, make a deep community impact and look beyond profit as a measure of success.

The big change for BBCO during the pandemic was that they had to close their taproom. Out of a total of 19 employees only three are furloughed until the taproom opens again sometime in the future. The great news for their sales was that because their distribution was already spread across Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, and Maine they were able to keep their brewing production schedule the same as pre-COVID-19. They also added Rhode Island to their distribution, with New Hampshire to follow soon. While people can't enter the taproom, they offer a very robust curbside program to keep all their locals content. From our conversation it was clear that co-ops such as your Brattleboro Food Co-op, Hunger Mountain Co-op, and City Market are among their biggest customers and have helped make a deep impact on their success during such uncertain times.

The future is bright for Burlington Beer Company. In the short-term they have an expansion of their taproom in Williston that will open once it becomes safer to gather people. In the long-term, Joe hopes to expand his brewing and open a second taproom. The plan would entail keeping the current location in Williston and opening a new taproom and smaller brewing facility in Burlington. While he is not looking for a new space it is always in the back of his mind, and he knows if he continues to grow in a responsible manner this dream could come true. Joe has also acquired a large number of bourbon and cognac barrels and has one of the largest barrel-aged beer programs in the state. He wants to move into this realm of brewing and further differentiate his offerings as well as see what flavors he can create through the aging process, and expanding in this area would allow their barrel-aged beers to be available during the wintertime. Lastly, he wants to do more for his staff by focusing on wages, additional benefits, and staff trips that deepen their knowledge of business as well as the brewing process. Stop in the Co-op during August and add Burlington Beer Company into your next basket of groceries. 🌱

