

Producer OF THE Month

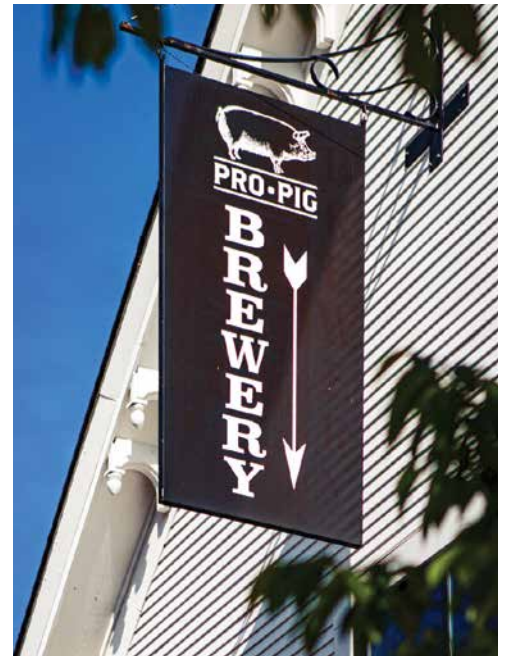
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BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE Month

by Jon Megas-Russell



The inception of Prohibition Pig and their current success have been built miraculously on the back of a natural disaster and a global pandemic. Not many businesses can claim to have weathered such adversity but the folk at Prohibition Pig can. In 2011, the space where their current restaurant and brewery is located on Main Street in Waterbury, VT, was flooded during Tropical Storm Irene, forcing the brewery and pub that occupied it at the time, The Alchemist, to find a new location. However, the owners of Prohibition Pig wanted to keep the 200-year-old building alive and continue its history of serving food and brewing beer, so they persevered through a big cleanup of the premises. In 2012 Prohibition Pig opened in The Alchemist's former space. The restaurant had great success from the start, focusing on Prohibition-style cocktails and smoked meat. But many of the old brewing elements,



such as the seven-barrel mash tun, remained in the basement, and as the owners continued to eye the system on site, they began crunching numbers on how they could make brewing a reality. A few years prior, the folk at Prohibition Pig had become close with then-economist Nate Johnson, who was brewing beer as a passion project on the side, learning the ins and outs of how to

brew perfectly balanced beer. In 2014, when Prohibition Pig made the jump to brewing beer on site, they hired Nate to lead their brewing operation. With a spectrum of beers on tap at all times, Prohibition Pig has now become a can't-miss restaurant in Vermont. And recently, Nate's dream of distributing beers to independent shops and co-ops in Vermont became a reality when they partnered with Zero Gravity Craft Brewery. Dare we say that the pandemic has brought some silver linings to Prohibition Pig? Especially for shoppers who can now enjoy their beer and seltzer right here at the Brattleboro Food Co-op, without having to make the two-hour drive to Waterbury.

In mid-March of 2020, like many businesses, Prohibition Pig abruptly shut down—initially for two weeks that eventually turned into a three-month closure. Nate and other Prohibition Pig staff went on unemployment and had lots of



time to reflect on life. It was a very stressful period with a massive amount of uncertainty—both for Nate personally and the brewery. Federal support kept Prohibition Pig afloat until the summer of 2020 when they opened back up with limited seating capacity. They have been steadily growing their business back up to pre-2020 levels and they predict that this summer is going to be extremely busy, which will get them back on a growth trajectory. Prior to and during the pandemic, one of Nate’s dreams was to find a partner/contract brewery that could produce and can their beers for distribution across Vermont. During the peak of the pandemic, it became ever more imperative for him and the new owners (they also own the restaurants Doc Pond and Hen of the Woods) to create a new revenue stream by distributing fresh beer across the state. During late 2020 and into 2021, they signed on to have Zero Gravity “contract brew” their three most popular beers and three seltzers. All of these beverages are Nate’s own recipes that he created and perfected over time. Upon signing on with Zero Gravity, Nate made sure that the recipes for these beers and seltzers were documented and communicated to Zero Gravity in an



exceptional manner. During the first stages of the “contract brewing,” Nate collaborated heavily with the head brewer, which continues to this day. By early 2021 Zero Gravity was brewing and canning Prohibition Pig’s flagship beers and seltzers for distribution. These products are: Little Fluffy Clouds Pale Ale, Bantam Double IPA, Daily Dolly Blonde Ale, and Prickly Pear, Lemon Lime, and Watermelon hard seltzers. Zero Gravity is the perfect partner because of their precision brewing, cleaning, and recipe execution. At this time Prohibition Pig’s beers and hard seltzers are only distributed in Vermont.

Head Brewer Nate Johnson grew up in Concord, NH, and earned an economics degree from Trinity College in Hartford, CT, before moving to Burlington, VT, in 2007. His passion as a self-taught brewer goes back to his college days and, more importantly, when he moved to Burlington and was experimenting with many hop profiles, flavors, and recipes. He loves the synthesis of creativity, science, math, and the mechanical perspective of his work. You may or may not be aware that, during the brewing process, cleanliness is paramount. Nate joked—as many brewers do—that he spends



more time cleaning than brewing. Which is one reason why Nate loves to dream up flavor profiles, develop recipes, and execute them with precision, in order to maximize every opportunity he has to brew. Nevertheless, he doesn't like to take his work too seriously—it's more important to ensure that the beer is delicious and was created in a fun space. As for his flavor goals, he seeks to make balanced beer along a wide spectrum. While IPAs are very popular, he also brews sour beers, stouts, blondes, German-style, lagers, reds, and seltzers. One vital aspect of his beers' flavor presentation is for it to be properly balanced. This is made possible with great recipes, excellent cleanliness, and of course, meticulous execution of the entire brewing process. For instance, Little Fluffy Clouds' hop combination is Nelson, Amarillo, and Simcoe, which creates a smooth mouth feel, one that comes from flaked oats in the gain bill, along with white grape to create an easy drinking pale ale.

This beer was also named after a 1990s song by the techno band, The Orb. It has become their most popular beer, with Bantam Double IPA now a close second. Bantam also exemplifies the balance they seek in brewing, as it is dry hopped with Equinox, Simcoe, and Mosaic, making it quite balanced and not over-hoppy. Bantam was named after the mascot at his alma mater, Trinity College. Nate is also very proud of their hard seltzers—especially the fact that they are clean, contain zero sugar, and have only four ingredients: water, natural flavor, citric acid, and CO₂. Juices, even in miniscule amounts, would over-sweeten such a beverage and thus he chose natural flavors instead of sugar for flavoring.

What does the future bring?

Prohibition Pig the restaurant wants to regain and exceed its volume of business prior to March 2020. This will allow for more experimentation with their food, system upgrades, and the potential for a

higher volume of fresh beer to be brewed. It may someday allow them to distribute a new style of beer through Zero Gravity but for the time being they are happy with their current volume and distribution. Nate wants to continue brewing a large spectrum of beers to continue to meet the flavor needs of varying customer preferences. He did mention that he would love to brew a smoked lager—it is fun flavor that would make for a nice experimentation and would be unique to their brewery and restaurant. The guys from the Prohibition Pig brewery will also get back to attending events to engage with their fans and customers in order to build relationships, collect feedback, and be a part of the Vermont brewery community. This summer they will attend the Vermont Brewers Festival in Burlington. We welcome you to stop on in at the Co-op and pick up one of the six delicious canned beers and seltzers from Prohibition Pig throughout June and beyond.

