

Got Beer? The Boys Are Back

April 3, 2016, should be marked as a banner day in Ocean State history and if you don't know why you must be as dry as the Sahara. Well ok, I'll tell you anyway. April 3 marks the day Narragansett Brewing announced they would be returning brewing operations to Rhode Island! When I first saw this announcement posted I thought it may have been a belated April Fool's joke since there have been hints for years that they were trying to return to RI. Fortunately this announcement was no joke. It was really happening. I personally confirmed it by walking by their new offices at the Isle Brewer's Guild (they prefer to be known as The Guild) in Pawtucket. Looks like we drank our part, and some of us maybe a little extra.

The Isle Brewer's Guild has purchased the Kelleway center in Pawtucket, which used to produce large screws for the Navy during WWII. It is an absolutely cavernous complex with plenty of space for brewing and lots of potential as a craft beer destination. In recent years, the space had been rented out to a few dance studios and other small businesses. Demolition of the old spaces and new construction was just beginning a few weeks ago and the plan is to have an operation going by mid-summer. Though with such an old building (1890s) there's bound to be a few setbacks and maybe some interesting discoveries. IBG will be a craft cooperative brewer, meaning that they will be guns for hire, brewing other people's beer and helping smaller breweries expand faster with less financial risk. They'll be working with a 100-barrel brewhouse when they get fully operational. One barrel is about 31 gallons, which is two of the standard-sized kegs you used to drink from at your college. With a single run on their brew kettle they will be able to make 200 kegs of beer. Top that all off with their 300 bbl fermenters and we're talking some serious capacity. IBG also will provide a full quality assurance department, as well as just about any service or tool a brewery would need to make a perfect batch of beer. Talking with one of the partners at IBG, Jeremy Duffy, the "marketing guy," it was pretty clear they have some large plans and a deep commitment to the craft beer community. Most recently, they allowed the Ocean State Homebrew Competition to use one of their spaces free for a weekend to host the competition and even held off demolition to accommodate these home brewers. (Thanks again, guys!)

But I digress. The new space is super cool, but what about Narragansett? Based on Mark Hellendrung's announcement, this move is the realization of a 15-year-old dream. And after a few false starts and at least one future home building burning down days before the closing, the victory must taste that much sweeter. The administrative offices have been moved in, even though it will be months before brewing capabilities will be completed. Says VP of Sales & Marketing Jim Crooks, "Some days I have to pinch myself when I realize it's actually happening and I see guys in hard hats outside my office really building our brewery."

Current plans for the move are still developing, but I can leave you with this: The craft portion of their portfolio will be made in RI at a future date (once the equipment is there) and there are plans to have a really cool tasting room. Stay tuned as the plans develop - tours and serious brewing should be fully realized some time in 2017.

Also, not to be missed: The Newport Beer Fest is holding its annual event on April 29 date at the Great Friends Meeting House, , Newport.