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Craft beer profile: Raleigh Brewing Co.

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Raleigh Brewing Company has been busy this year.

In March, the brewery and RBC-owned Atlantic Brew Supply celebrated their two-year anniversary by throwing a big party. Then in April, head brewer John Federal turned in his paddle for another job in South Carolina around the same time the brewery was just getting ready to commence canning its beer for the first time.



DATHAN KAZSUK

Raleigh Brewing Company's President Kristie Nystedt and head brewer Alex Smith.

It didn't take long to find a replacement, as RBC President Kristie Nystedt promoted assistant brewer Alex Smith to the head brewer position. And now with cans of RBC in local bottle shops around Raleigh – the gang is looking to continue the success into the summer with the current release of the First Squeeze American Wheat Ale with blood oranges as well as the July release of Dear Ol' Dixie pale ale in cans.

Nystedt and Smith sat down with *Triangle Business Journal* for an interview.

Tell us a little bit about the hardware behind Raleigh Brewing Company?

Smith: We have a 20-barrel brew house. We have four 20-barrel fermentors and four 40-barrel fermentors. Then we have one 40-barrel brite-tank and two 20-barrel brite-tanks. That's essentially what we're working with tank-wise. Typically, we're

brewing about three to five times a week. Our canning is like having another production line, and now we're reaching a new market – much more aggressively than we were with bottles.

On April 1, Raleigh Brewing Co. started canning its beer. How has that changed the way RBC operates?

Smith: With bottles we were doing it by hand and in small quantities – therefore the price point was a little higher. We just didn't have the volume to get it out to a lot of our accounts. But with the cans, we're able to get into a lot more shops like Total Wine, **Whole Foods** and we can start to approach grocery stores.

You guys still self-distribute your product. How important is being able to self-distribute your beers?

Nystedt: It's very important to us. Customer service is how you gain loyalty. Every time we drop something off to a customer we have an opportunity to build a relationship.

With RBC self-distributing, I'm assuming your reach isn't too far outside of the Triangle, correct?

Nystedt: Yes. We're going about 45-minutes from our core location.

Smith: We are definitely Raleigh-centric. But we now have someone who distributes to the Durham and Chapel Hill area. We always really wanted to grow in concentric circles, especially with self-distribution. It doesn't really make sense to have one account an hour-and-a-half away just so you can say you are there. Our name is the Raleigh Brewing Company, so it just makes sense for us to saturate the Raleigh market.

Being very Raleigh-centric, I've noticed you do a lot for charities around the area as well.

Nystedt: We love to be involved in the community. We use a local bank, Fidelity Bank, and they're doing a North Carolina food drive because the shelves of the North Carolina Food Bank were actually empty about a month ago. So right now, we're doing a food drive where if you bring in five cans of food you can get a free Raleigh Brewing T-shirt.

What advice would you give to many of the new breweries popping up in our state lately. Do you start small and grow into the business, or do you need to start off strong and jump right into the deep end?

Nystedt: It depends on what you are after. That's what makes the brewery industry so unique. Different business models work for different people. You can dip your toes in, and do what people call "proof of concept." For me, I needed to dive in and put all our energy into it. For us, it was to create three business at the same time and get the right people on board.

If you were on a tropical island and you were only able to drink three beers, what three would you select?

Nystedt: Hell Yes Ma'am, because it's pretty much part of my blood stream by now. I'd also pick Sweet Josie from Lonerider and Stone IPA.

Smith: Almost any Berliner Weisse, especially if we're talking hot weather. Moravian Rhapsody, because I just love that beer. And Alagash White ... that's one of those beers where if there is nothing else, it's my safety beer.

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