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VOLUME 8 | ISSUE 3 | August 2020

GUNWHALE ALES: GOING COASTAL



JT Wallace (Co-Founder), Kevin Hammons (Head Brewer), Justin Miller (Co-Founder), Bobby Fitzgerald (Co-Founder)

Photo Credit: Greg Nagel

by Daniel Drennon

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friends since kindergarten. Fast forward a couple of decades and Bobby Fitzgerald, who grew up in La Jolla and developed his love of beer travelling Europe in the '90s, becomes fast friends with Justin when their wives were both 4th grade teachers in San Diego.

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on a Brew Magic system that would become the pilot system for Gunwhale Ales in Costa Mesa. With a shared vision and sage advice from Alex Tweet, yeah that Alex Tweet --- the bad ass brewmaster of Fieldwork, the three men opened their brewery in late November 2016 in the building where J.T.'s construction work was based.

They hired Derek Testerman is their initial "pro brewer" but Testerman was committed to moving back to the east coast where he was from. After a year with Derek at the brew helm, they hired Kevin Hammons who was Director of Brewing Operation for Evans Brewing. Hammons had spent nine years learning his craft at The Bruery,

moving from the warehouse there to the brew deck.

The first three years of success and critical acclaim at their intimate Costa Mesa location inspired the three co-founders to expand to a much larger second spot in Orange. The future appeared bright.

[full cover story online]

PLEASE SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL BREWERY

COVER STORY

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Then Covid-19 hit and, like all breweries, Gunwhale Ales has been hit hard.

I reached out to Kevin Hammons, whose beers I admire, and co-founder Bobby Fitzgerald, whose Cali-cool branding I respect, to ask how they are holding up in these trying times.



JT Wallace (Co-Founder), Kevin Hammons (Head Brewer), Justin Miller (Co-Founder), Bobby Fitzgerald (Co-Founder)
Photo Credit: Greg Nagel

DRENNON: Kevin. Where did you grow up, what was your childhood like, and how did that mold you into who you are today?

HAMMONS: I grew up in Orange, CA and had a pretty "normal" childhood I would say. My parents were together and both worked to provide a comfortable living environment for my younger sister and I. I think that seeing them both work that hard gave me a strong work ethic.

DRENNON: What did you aspire to be growing up, and then what led to your actual path to become a brewer?

HAMMONS: I was always interested in science, but never really decided on a field. The science and technical aspects of brewing were definitely part of the attraction to me initially.

DRENNON: Like all brewers, you were a homebrewer. When did you start home brewing?

HAMMONS: I had a pretty deep curiosity about beer once I turned 21 and could go out and experience the variety of beer at places like Hollingshead Deli. A friend and I started homebrewing later that year when we were both still 21, in an effort to learn more about beer styles and what makes different beers look and taste the way they do.

DRENNON: How long was it before

you thought you could go pro? How difficult was that transition and tell us about the learning curve to get there?

HAMMONS: I remember thinking after the first batch, "I think I want to try and do this for a living." I had no clue how or if it was possible at the time though. I still hadn't seen a brewery, and there weren't really a lot around locally at the time. We just continued brewing 2 or 3 times a month for a while, and eventually joined the homebrew club BrewCommune. There I met Patrick Rue and Tyler King while they were just building The Bruery. After volunteering to help enough times I was eventually offered a job in the warehouse there packing orders, labeling and waxing bottles, and supervising the little homebrew shop in front. After about a year of doing that I jumped into an open brewing position.

DRENNON: You had a significant "climbing the ladder" seven-year stint at The Bruery. Tell us about a few of your biggest challenges and best highlights.

HAMMONS: We had a great team there, and it was really fun to learn and grow there for so long. Most of the biggest challenges ended up being the highlights. Every expansion we did was hard, but rewarding to see the results. Patrick dreamt up some pretty

wild concepts sometimes and it was up to us to figure out how to make them a reality. Each time we succeeded in hitting that target flavor profile was a great feeling.

DRENNON: Then you moved on to become Director of Brewing Operations for Evans Brewing. How did that factor into your development as a brewer?

HAMMONS: I got to learn a lot more of the business-side of the industry there. TTB reporting, managing budgets, dealing with the ABC, etc. That brewery was also a lot more of a production brewery where we focused on fine-tuning a few brands and really maximizing output.

DRENNON: When, where and how did you meet the Gunwhale guys and what made the Head Brewer job attractive to you? What lessons have you learned in your three years at Gunwhale Ales?

HAMMONS: I had initially met them several times at beer festivals and events. When I saw they were hiring I immediately thought that it would be a great opportunity. They were less than a year old at the time still, so I had the chance to put my stamp on things and make some improvements I thought would be good. I was really interested in the mix of styles they were brewing. I also enjoy growth and pushing a company forward a lot, so moving to a small startup brewery with an upcoming expansion was enticing as well. I have definitely learned a lot. We did most of the work on the Orange facility ourselves, and there were a lot of construction tasks that I had never done before. We have a mash filter now on our new brewhouse, that's something I'm still learning.

DRENNON: Tell us about the Gunwhale name, the coastal ales ideology and what "Preserve the Wild" means to you and the co-founders. Bobby Fitzgerald is the artist-in-residence at Gunwhale, so feel free to kick this answer to him if you wish.

FITZGERALD: The brand architecture

really is about the place. We wanted to capture the intent of farmhouse brewing, but on the West Coast. And being located in Orange County, named for its history of fertile growing fields for citrus, beans, nuts...we thought a coastal concept, right between land and sea, would fit the vibe. The beers are about what grows here, the seasons, the people, the geography, the history from early on until now. Belgian brewers talk about "brewing to make the landscape known"...and I think that resonates with us.

We were always going to focus on both Saisons and IPAs. That meant rustic, yet complex beers with big aromatics and high drinkability. These are beers that are well hopped, but we also really push the yeast to for nuanced expressions. We thought it fit the lifestyle, the cuisine, and we liked how it allowed us to recall traditional techniques but also allowed us to create our own version of what we



Kevin Hammons on the brew deck at Gunwhale's Orange facility
Photo Credit: Bobby Fitzgerald

loved about the beers that brought us into the business. "Preserve the Wild" is a tagline that refers to the wild beers we make, but also a nostalgia for vintage California, its rugged terrain, abundant resources, and an Old West individualism.

DRENNON: *As Bobby just pointed out, he and your other co-founders Justin and JT are passionate about farmhouse tradition and crafting lovely saisons. As the head brewer, how have you juggled that core sensibility with the need to also make West Coast hoppy beers?*

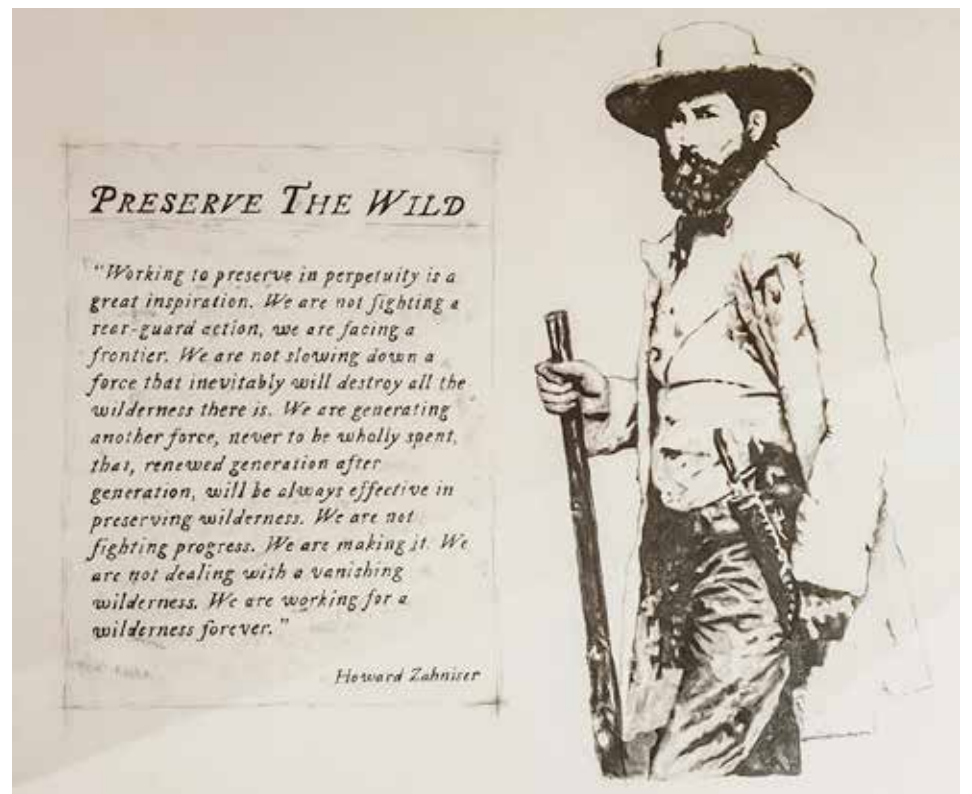
HAMMONS: I look at each beer style from both an artistic and technical perspective. Brewing farmhouse styles is more of an expression of yeast esters and rustic malt character, and trying to balance the hops and any spices, fruit, or other ingredients we add to enhance that experience, but not overpower it. Brewing hoppy beers, you get to play more with hop combinations, addition times, dry hopping rates, etc. Getting that perfect balance of flavor, aroma, and bitterness, with the right malt balance underneath is the challenge there.

DRENNON: *Do you have a brewing philosophy and what role does "passion" play?*

HAMMONS: I don't know if I have a philosophy per-se, but I guess the first word that comes to mind is "simplicity." Not muddling flavors with too many ingredients, using real fruit and ingredients that aren't overly processed, improving brewhouse efficiency, and tuning cellar processes. Passion is everything in brewing. It isn't an easy job in general, but it is so much more difficult to constantly push to grow and improve in every way possible. It takes a lot of passion to not only try to always make the best beer possible, but also to grow and learn to be the best brewer you can be.

DRENNON: *Gunwhale recently announced that you have signed a distribution deal with Craft LA and Craft SD. What is exciting about this new partnership and direction?*

FITZGERALD: We've always had interest in the brand and the styles we make from outside of our county. We simply were too small to make an impact. Finding distribution partners will be key for us. We have to replace the taproom income that has been lost, and we luckily were moving



Preserve the Wild mural (charcoal by Bobby Fitzgerald) at Gunwhale's Orange facility
Photo Credit: Bobby Fitzgerald

towards expansion already. Having the whole territory from Santa Maria to the border of Arizona to the border of Mexico under one roof just makes sense to us. And Craft Beer Guild has the infrastructure and team in place.

HAMMONS: It's a huge opportunity for us to get our beer out to a larger market. We've always seen some demand outside of Orange County, but were unable to do much about it when we were self-distributing and before we had the larger production facility. We brew beer for people to enjoy, and now more people can so that's great.

DRENNON: *You also just bought a canning line. Who did you go with, why and what are the associated goals with making this investment?*

FITZGERALD: The quick answer is that we always planned for it, but mobile canning costs are high, and beer is being sold in cans right now. It was time to pivot and move quickly.

It is a Cask Automated canning line. We liked it because it was used and affordable. But it is compact in size and runs about 35 cans a minute, and it should produce low DO with control easy enough to run with a lean team."

HAMMONS: We've been increasing can output a lot over the last year or so. Having our own canning line allows us to keep quality at the highest level, and also allows us to keep the beer competitively priced in the market. We went with a really nice Cask line that

we were able to find used for a good deal.

DRENNON: *Your original spot opened in November of 2016 in Costa Mesa followed by the second location in Orange which opened late in 2019. Now, the original brewery will serve almost like your R&D facility, focusing on small batch, mixed fermentation and wild ales. Explain the advantages.*

HAMMONS: Right now, just having the smaller tanks there to be able to continue to develop new beers and have some fun with draft-only projects is critical while the larger tanks in Orange are mostly used to keep cans and some core brands going. Draft sales have declined massively since COVID and this allows us to make just enough without sitting on anything too long. Eventually it will fully convert over to Brettanomyces and mixed culture projects. It's really important for us to keep that separate from clean beer in order to maintain extremely high quality standards.

DRENNON: *I would be remiss to not ask you about the impact of COVID to your business?*

FITZGERALD: Opening a brand new large location and not having your taproom to pay the bills is brutal. If we were only our original spot, we would have been fine. But no one could have predicted this. We were also hoping to have baseball season

(COVER STORY continued)

to help bring in the crowds, since we are very close to Angels Stadium, and that too was cancelled. We run a very lean operation, and don't really have enough full time people to operate 2 locations, and add ecommerce, distribution, and delivery in order to make up for it. But that's pretty much what had to happen.

HAMMONS: Losing most of your tasting room sales hurts a lot. We've been fortunate to do well enough with to-go sales, but those will never sustain a brewery for long. Having just opened the production facility and larger tasting room in Orange was also pretty inconvenient timing.

DRENNON: *Do you see a full (financial) recovery and, if so, how long will it take?*

FITZGERALD: Eventually we will get back to normal. This is a time to pivot, and not be caught flat-footed. As a business owner, you cannot be paralyzed. You have to find a way through. We are lucky to have such a loyal customer base...and that comes from selling beer one by one to locals for 3 years through the taproom. I think it will take a while to fully recover, but we worked our tails off to expand, and we finally have infrastructure in place to get the beer out. Hopefully those outlets are happy and we hope our many retailer partners make it through as well. We make it together.

HAMMONS: I think we'll end up fine eventually. I know a lot of breweries are hurting, and many are closing. We've done pretty well to find ways to sell beer by switching to mostly cans vs kegs and signing on with Craft to help distribute. We also have a lot of loyal customers supporting our tasting rooms, whether on the patios or to-go. It will definitely be a long time until things go back to normal though.

DRENNON: *As a brewer, especially in this insane year of 2020, you probably don't have any time for hobbies. But down the road, what do you enjoy doing should any spare time ever materialize?*

HAMMONS: I enjoy cooking, so I still get to do that everyday pretty much. I also like hockey and look forward to both watching and playing again. I'm on a beer league ice hockey team, but it's been a long time since we were all on the ice together.



Gunwhale's Orange taproom

Photo Credit: Justin Halbert



Kevin Hammons (Head Brewer)

Photo Credit: John Troxell

DRENNON: *My favorite question: between talent and work ethic, which is more important?*

HAMMONS: Work ethic, definitely. Does anyone say talent? Talent only gets you so far, and even with talent, if you don't have the work ethic to apply it it's useless. Working hard towards goals can build talent, but it also builds strength and intelligence.

DRENNON: *If you had to describe yourself in one word or phrase, what would it be?*

HAMMONS: Reliable.

DRENNON: *Any final thoughts in these trying times?*

FITZGERALD: We still love beer. Some people have become jaded as the industry has grown and evolved. Beer has become many things and that is great...but to us, it will always be best at being a unifying force. Beer is the age old past time because it has always been about community... from the harvesting of grain and hops to communal nature of eating and drinking it, sharing it, and relaxing over it. We hope it can continue to reach new consumers, bring diverse peoples together, and help us share the humanity in one another.

SAN DIEGO ALLIANCE

THE LAUNCH OF SAN DIEGO BEER NEWS®

by Daniel Drennon



NEW SAN DIEGO BEER NEWS® WEBSITE IS ON TAP ONLINE!

Most extensive, comprehensive online resource for key information on San Diego's world-famous brewing scene debuts to help struggling businesses during COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

SAN DIEGO, CA (August 10, 2020)

—Last week marked the launch of the SAN DIEGO BEER NEWS® website (www.sandiegobeer.news), a one-stop resource for all things #SDBeer. Packed with news on San Diego's 150-plus breweries, openings, closings, work-in-progress projects, and what's happening and tapping around the county, it's the most extensive resource

Beer Paper is excited to share with our readers that Brandon Hernández, one of our favorite beer writers on the planet and the leading voice, champion of the critically acclaimed San Diego beer scene has created an all-things-San Diego-beer website, San Diego Beer News.

Hernández and Beer Paper's Daniel Drennon have been colleagues, contemporaries and have shared a friendship and mutual respect since each began covering their respective beer scenes well over a decade ago. Drennon was thrilled when Hernández reached out to offer an alliance in which Beer Paper will provide north of San Diego coverage for San Diego Beer News and, similarly, San Diego Beer News will be the de facto San Diego correspondent for Beer Paper.

"It is the proverbial win, win scenario. We have had tremendous respect for Brandon over the years. His relentless honesty and integrity covering San Diego's breweries and beers won us over early and remains the foundation of the mutual respect we share. We are super stoked to be able to share his unparalleled knowledge of everything San Diego beer with our readers and aspire to do the same about the Los Angeles, Orange County, Inland Empire and Ventura County for his readers."

Beer Paper will run a monthly San Diego feature from our sister publication San Diego Beer News in our newspaper and on our website. Beer Paper's hard copy edition is currently on hiatus until such time that brewery tap rooms are back open to capacity with beer fans and readers.

Cheers! Stay safe. Stay strong!

that's ever existed for information on the region's renowned beer scene. And it arrives when local brewing companies need it most as they struggle to survive during the pandemic.

"With our world-class breweries facing so many challenges due to COVID-19, I was motivated to pull the trigger on my longtime ambition to create a modern, comprehensive platform for telling their stories and helping people further discover and patronize the businesses making up San Diego's vibrant beer scene," says founder **Brandon Hernández**, a native San Diegan who has covered the county's brewing industry for local and national magazines, newspapers and online outlets for 13 years (full bio provided below).

Designed by local film and multimedia firm Paradeigm, the San Diego Beer News® website features:

- Articles on local beer-industry news, beers, events and industry happenings

(SD NEWS continued on page 6)



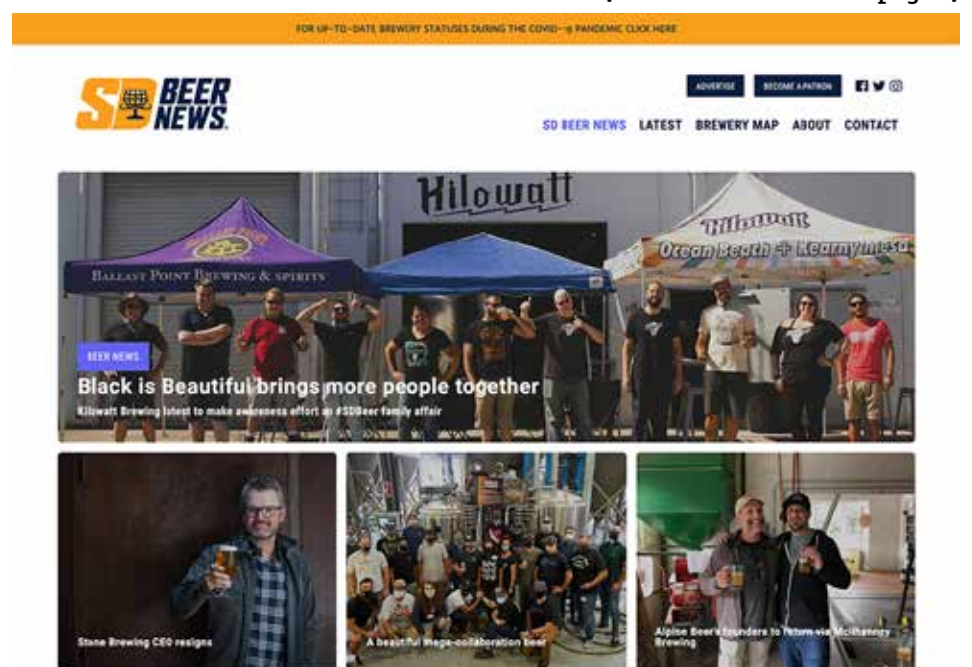
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Email: brandon@sandiegobeer.news



SD Beer News' homepage

Courtesy of SD Beer News

(SD NEWS continued)

- Guest columns from industry insiders sharing opinions on subjects that matter to them
- A constantly updated map listing every San Diego brewery-owned venue in the county
- **Up-to-date COVID-related information for the county's breweries and tasting rooms**
- Beer-and-food pairing articles and recipes for dishes and beers from local chefs and brewers
- Job listings from San Diego County breweries (coming soon)
- Dedicated platforms for partners, including:
 - 91X FM's Beer for Breakfast video series
 - ALT 949 FM's Rock & Roll Happy Hour broadcasts
 - The Indie Beer Show podcast series
 - California Craft Brewers Association, local breweries' representatives in Sacramento
 - Pink Boots Society, a women's advocacy industry non-profit organization
 - **Mujeres Brew Club**, a Latina women's education group
 - QUAFF, San Diego's largest, most award-winning homebrew club
 - Beer Paper, a trusted publication serving L.A., Orange, Riverside and the Central Coast

Each week, San Diego Beer News® delivers a **This Week in #SDBeer** email newsletter to subscribers listing beers being released at breweries around the county, as well as events (post-pandemic) and other features such as a **Beer of the Week** and beer selections from local bottle shop chain, Bottlecraft, providing a valuable informational resource that has never existed in San Diego County.

To further assist the local brewing industry during these tough times (and beyond), a percent of annual profits earned through the website will be donated to the San Diego Brewers Guild, the volunteer-driven organization serving and composed of staff from local brewing companies.

“People are under the impression there is little or nothing going on in the brewing industry during the pandemic, but one look at the site will disprove that,” says Hernández, who also worked in the local industry for seven years and wrote two guides to the county's breweries. “There has never been a greater need to give San Diego breweries a helping hand an spotlight their high-quality beers, hard work, and indomitable spirit, It's an honor to do the best job I can for them while also giving people like me—fans of amazing San Diego beer—the type of reliable resource we've been thirsting for.”

The San Diego Beer News® website URL is: <http://sandiegobeer.news>. Fan can sign up for the weekly email newsletter there, and follow San Diego Beer News® on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Those looking to support the site can sign up to do so and get news first at: <http://patreon.com/sandiegobeernews>.

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ABOUT BRANDON HERNÁNDEZ: A native San Diegan, **Brandon Hernández** is an award-winning journalist who has covered his hometown's brewing industry for 13 years and authored two editions of the *San Diego Beer News® Complete Guide to San Diego Breweries*. He was the first-ever beer columnist for *San Diego Magazine* and *San Diego Reader*, and served as Senior Editor for beverage publication *West Coaster* for nearly a decade. He has served as a craft-beer correspondent for FOX 5 San Diego and The CW San Diego, consulted for Food Network, Zagat and numerous San Diego County breweries,

ghost-written and contributed to numerous cookbook projects, and been featured on numerous TV shows, radio programs and podcasts. He and his work have been featured in dozens of publications, including *USA Today*, *Wine Enthusiast*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, *All About Beer Magazine*, *Beer Magazine*, *The Beer Connoisseur Magazine*, *Beer Paper*, *Celebrator Beer News*, *Craft Beer & Brewing Magazine*, *Imbibe Magazine*, *The New Brewer Magazine*, *The Full Pint*, *Edible San Diego Magazine*, *Modern Luxury*, *Pacific San Diego Magazine*, *Ranch & Coast Magazine*, *Tasting Table* and many more. He worked within the brewing industry in marketing roles with Stone Brewing, AleSmith Brewing and Societe Brewing, and is the founder of Beer to the Rescue, a charity campaign that has raised more than \$150,000 for the Lupus Foundation of Southern California since 2015. For more information, consult Brandon Hernández's writing website.



SD Beer News' homepage

Courtesy of SD Beer News

OPINION

HE SAID WINE. WE SAID BEER! A CALIFORNIA PERSPECTIVE

by David Mulvihill



Inside before outside at Island Brewing

First published in 2008, He Said Beer, She Said Wine was inspired by dinner pairing competitions that prominent Philadelphia-area sommelier Marnie Old and famed owner and founder of Dogfish Head craft brewery (Milton, DE) Sam Calagione have been holding for many few years.

While inspired by the above title, and a wine vs. beer debate that has continued for longer than my first glass of wine or beer, my column this month focuses more on California's COVID-19 business-related requirements, and how present restrictions might serve to favor one segment of the industry over another.

Restrictions at Hand

On July 13th, in an effort to further quell the spread, the Governor, in conjunction with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), mandated that all ABC-licensed businesses with on-premises consumption of alcoholic beverages immediately discontinue all indoor operations. All-inclusive, it applied to wineries, breweries, distilleries, bars, restaurants, brewpubs, and clubs would cease indoor operations.

In addition, all breweries, distilleries, bars, and clubs were directed to "... discontinue all outdoor operations, unless they operate a restaurant on the licensed premises (either by way of a

bona fide eating place on the premises or through the use of a bona fide meal provider pursuant to prior Relief issued by the Department)."

Wineries were left out of the above additional imposed requirements. Yes, wineries can serve wine to patrons outdoors without having to meet any meal component requirement that all other licensees must comply with. CDPH and CA ABC guidance appears to be silent in addressing reasons why wineries remain free of these additional, cumbersome, and costly restrictions. In order to stay open for business, stand-alone breweries with tasting rooms must line-up meal providers or close sales for onsite consumption, its major economic lifeblood source.

The Wine Institute was quick to publish the following, on July 13th, in its message communicating Governor Newsom's newly imposed restrictions, "Under the statewide directive, all winery tasting rooms in the state must move operations outdoors while continuing to follow the guidance for Restaurants, Bars, and Wineries. The order also requires restaurants and all other alcohol beverage licensees to serve a meal in order to serve alcohol for onsite consumption. The meal requirement does not apply to winery tasting rooms unless otherwise ordered by the county."



All Photo Credit: David Mulvihill

Wine Tastings

Questions
While this reporter questions the meal requirement for any licensees (as long as outdoor and distancing requirements are met), the disparity of rules for one licensee or industry-type is more-troubling. If restrictions are being imposed across-the-board for the common good, does it make sense to make allowances or draw up a separate set of rules for wine vs. beer? What is the difference between having a glass of wine outdoors (with proper distancing), or a glass of beer, or the beverage of your choice? Why does requiring someone to purchase food make it any safer?

What appears to be obvious disparate treatment definitely causes one to question.

Historic inequalities in the beverage industry have existed, likely in-part, to the strength of a particular industry lobby. One readily relatable example: CA CRV deposit is mandatory for every bottle of beer, but absent from bottles of wine or liquor.

In these days of COVID-19, the strength of a particular lobbyist's influence on our State's legislative powers should not be a factor that differentiates our common health goals.

Interesting fact: Our Governor Newsom is a founder and owner of PlumpJack Winery in Oakville (Napa), CA.

He said wine. We said beer too!

Beer Paper's newly minted OC Columnist David Mulvihill thirsts to experience and promote the best of what craft beer has to offer. He also covers Southern California for SoCal Food & Beverage Professional Magazine and provides business-side support (reporting, excise tax, policies & personnel) to local breweries and brewers guilds. david@socalcraftbeer.com.



The New Normal atop Pizza Port San Clemente

EDITORIAL

LA BREWERS VS. LA SUPERVISORS

by Tomm Carroll

Exactly a century ago, the United States was subjected to the so-called “noble (ignoble is more like it) experiment” of Prohibition, the nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages. It was the 18th Amendment to our Constitution.

Now, just over 100 years after Prohibition became the law of the land, as California is struggling to contain the spread of the Coronavirus during a worldwide pandemic, the County of Los Angeles has enacted another kind of ban: prohibiting all its production breweries with taprooms from serving their wares to patrons — even in their outdoor areas when partnered with a third-party food vendor, thereby requiring customers to order food in order to be served alcohol beverages.

In case you haven’t been following the situation closely, here is some background: This “Phase 2” outdoor service was previously allowed for all LA County breweries on June 1 (and up to two weeks earlier in the state’s other 57 counties), after some 80 days of “Phase 1,” which was enacted in mid-March when most businesses were shut down due to the pandemic. Fortunately, California brewery taprooms were considered “essential businesses” and did not have to cease operations (breweries in some US states were not so lucky), but that initial phase only allowed beer-to-go and delivery options. Sadly, LA County breweries are now back to “Phase 1,” and have been since June 29, when this rollback was immediately mandated.

Adding insult — actually three insults — to injury:

1) After less than three weeks of “Phase 2” outdoor service, on June 19, the county moved into “Phase 3,” in which bars and other businesses were allowed to reopen, and production brewery taprooms no longer had to partner with food vendors in order to serve alcohol beverages to patrons outside. Apparently, it was too much too soon (state virus cases were



LA Brewers Guild Save LA Breweries campaign

Courtesy of LA Brewers Guild

spiking, especially in LA County), as it lasted only 10 days statewide.

2) While the rest of California’s counties had their regulations for breweries understandably rolled back to “Phase 2,” the LA County Board of Supervisors were much stricter, kicking its brewery taprooms all the way back to “Phase 1.”

3) Incongruously, LA County brewpubs (that, by definition, have onsite kitchens) were treated like restaurants and allowed to regress only to “Phase 2.” Brewpubs represent roughly one-third of the 93 breweries in the Los Angeles County Brewers Guild. These times are tough for them too, but at least they have on-premise business on which to rely. Still, the county’s brewpubs support lifting the ban on their fellow breweries.

It’s been more than 60 days (and counting) since the Supes’ two-steps-back for brewery taprooms, as I’m writing this in late August. And, after receiving support from the California Craft Brewers Association (CCBA), state organizations and small-business associations, the LABG’s outreach to

the County Supervisors, and even the Health Department, have so far gone unheeded.

Call to Action

So, beginning Monday, August 24, the guild launched a weeklong social media campaign, asking breweries and local beer fans alike to urge a response through e-mails, tweets and Insta-bombardments to the quintet of Supes, one each business day. To read more about the campaign, and to find out how you can help, visit: <https://labrewersguild.org/savelabrewers/>

Also, on the 26th, Guild executive director Franny Lopez did an Instagram interview with San Diego-based beer writer Beth Demmon about the campaign. In addition, a social media post to county leaders from LABG past president Laurie Porter, co-owner of Smog City Brewing in Torrance, was quoted in an August 25 article about the guild’s lobbying efforts by NBC LA’s City News Service.

“We have done our due diligence to create a safe environment for our

customers and our staff and continue to evolve with the ever-changing policies set forth to protect our community,” she said in the post. “We know we can meet the standards and regulations set upon us... [and] are asking you to step forward and align with our community-driven businesses — ones that our local municipalities rely heavily upon to drive tourism, community and quality of life.”

Elsewhere in the Instagram post, Porter cuts to the chase: “We are asking for a chance to survive this pandemic intact, a chance to save the jobs we have created and the taxes we pay.”

While at press time it seems that the guild still hasn’t received a response from the county, the uncredited CNS reporter apparently did: “...[C]ounty officials told City News Service [that] breweries are still considered ‘high-risk’ businesses for possible spread of COVID-19, particularly among younger residents, and thus cannot be permitted to re-open.”

CNS also spoke to Janice Hahn, one of the five Supes, who represents the South Bay (home to many of LA’s



*Caylen Stultz practicing safety protocols at LA Ale Works taproom.
Photo Courtesy of LA Ale Works*

craft breweries, including Smog City), and was an early proponent of re-opening businesses back in May. “I am worried about the toll these closures have taken on our local breweries,” she told the reporter, at least expressing a modicum of concern. “While it doesn’t seem fair, these are the tough decisions our public health experts are making to protect people and slow the spread of this virus.”

Nearly six months into this pandemic, and the stop-start-stop guidelines for alcohol-focused businesses, no one has to talk to the LA brewers about “tough decisions.”

The Health Department also released a statement to the news service, claiming, “...[W]e are still seeing concerning levels of community spread and high case counts... Because of that, we do not recommend businesses...where COVID-19 can spread easily to be re-opened.”

Mustering a semblance of empathy, the statement offers, “We understand this is a hardship for local business owners and we want to get to a place where it is safe to continue on our recovery journey and re-open our local businesses. The task in front of us is to be able to thread the needle so that we continue with our recovery journey while protecting the health and well-

being of our residents, our workforce and our community.”

Whether LA County succeeds in navigating the eye of that needle or winds up sewing shut any chance of survival for those breweries currently hanging on by a thread remains to be seen.

The entire City News Service article can be found at <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/los-angeles-craft-breweries-coronavirus-reopen/2418596/>

**Meet the New Rules
(Same As the Old Rules)**

California Governor Gavin Newsom’s new Coronavirus re-opening rules for businesses, which were announced August 28 and takes effect August 31, don’t seem to offer any imminent hope for LA breweries either. Under these guidelines, all Southern California counties (sans San Diego) are placed in “Tier 1, Widespread Transmission” (more than seven new COVID cases per 100,000 people per day and a Coronavirus test positivity rate of more than 8%). “Tier 1” leaves restaurants exactly where they are now: outdoor service only, with the continued exception of LA County production brewery taprooms, of course; same as it seemingly ever was.

So it’s still in the hands of the Supes. And the Health Department. And as anyone who has ever opened a brewery in the county, and especially the city of LA in the last decade or so can attest, the process can be a Kafkaesque nightmare of bureaucratic red tape, inconsistent regulations and ever-changing requirements. Unless your brewery is in the cities of Pasadena or Long Beach (which have their own less-draconian health departments), you’ve got to engage with, and abide by, the LA County Hell — I mean, Health — Department.

So on one hand, what did LA County breweries expect in the midst of a health crisis? But on the other, after more than 90 job-creating and tax-paying breweries having opened successfully in the county over the past 10 years, wouldn’t one think the Supes and bureaucrats would finally get a clue? Don’t they know that sanitation and cleanliness are inherent in the brewing process, as well as in taproom service, be it inside or out?

Refer to the LABG website for more reasons why this modern-day Prohibition that discriminates against businesses by geography and alcohol-license type not only “doesn’t seem fair” (as Ms. Hahn suggests), it clearly is unfair.

Supervisors, it’s time to stop ignoring the pleas of the LA brewers and start a dialogue with them to find a safe and sane solution that saves our breweries as well as lives.

Tomm Carroll, being in the “vulnerable” age group for COVID-19, is currently content buying beer from local breweries to drink at home in LA County, but looks forward to the day when their taprooms re-open — outside as well as in. Reach him at beerscribe@earthlink.net.



*Cesar Gustavo (left) and Cesar Gomez (right) at Common Space taproom
Photo Courtesy of @commonspacela*