



HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING



— MOUNT —
ARROWSMITH
BREWING COMPANY

Starting a new business venture is difficult and can, at times, be nail-biting and hectic. The uncertainty, the economic pressure, the lack of recognition, finding a spot in the marketplace and holding on for dear life. Many businesses fail in their first year or two, caving in to these pressures.

Then there's the Mount Arrowsmith Brewery. They swung open their doors in April 2017, and by September of the same year, they were awarded Gold and Silver medals for two of their beers, and were named Brewery of the Year by the British Columbia Beer Awards.

Boom!

Calls started coming into the Parksville-based craft brewery, begging for their product in restaurants and pubs across the province. This kicked what was supposed to be a longer-term plan into high gear, all the while turning the Mount Arrowsmith Brewing Company into a hub of activity in the Parksville-Qualicum Beach district of beautiful Vancouver Island on Canada's west coast.

Spotlight on Business Magazine spoke with owner Matt Hill about the family-run brewery, its beginnings a mere year ago, and its almost immediate success.

By John Allaire

Any creative person will tell you that their best ideas come at the strangest times.

In this case, it was over a game of ping pong between Hill and his cousin. "We had been looking around and keeping our eyes open for different business opportunities," Hill explains. "We come from a family of entrepreneurs and we wanted to try and branch off and do something ourselves. We were drinking some good craft beer at the time and we were



Richards Packaging Inc.

Craft Beer Bottle Line



Good things come in Richards Packaging!

www.richardspackaging.com

Canada: 1-604-207-5513

US: 1-800-258-4292

Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Quebec City, Halifax, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Sacramento, Portland, Seattle, Memphis, Tacoma, Phoenix

big fans of the whole craft revolution. And we wondered 'why doesn't our area have a craft brewery?' Why is it taking so long to get here and how can we help? How can we make it happen in this market?"

The conversation led to some marketplace research with a view toward understanding why there was seemingly a gap in the booming craft beer industry in Parksville. While the cousins couldn't come up with a definitive answer, their research revealed that Parksville-Qualicum Beach was the largest market left in British Columbia without a craft brewery. That was enough rationale for them.



"We started to look at how saturated the market was and could the market withstand another craft brewery. And as far as we could tell, the answer was yes," Hill points out. "We realized that there were a ton of craft breweries in a lot smaller markets than Parksville-Qualicum Beach. So then it became a lot more of a serious conversation saying hey, if we don't do this, someone else is going to."

The venture was purely business. Aside from enjoying the odd craft beer themselves, the cousins had no previous brewing experience. Hill explains, "No, we certainly had a little bit of home-brewing experience. And we certainly love to drink a lot of the craft brews. But no, we have a lot of hospitality experience, so that certainly plays into what we do. But we don't have much in the way of a manufacturing background. So there was a steep learning curve for us. And we knew right out of the gate that if we were going to do this thing right, we were going have to look for somebody to run the back-end of things and to be our head brewer at our facility."

"Could the market withstand another craft brewery? And as far as we could tell, the answer was yes"

Enter David Woodward, a renown and experienced brewer who just happened to be entertaining a career move, should the right deal come along. Hill explains, "It was just one of those things where I think we were lucky enough to have a lot of stars line up. Once we got a little further along into building the business, it was through my cousin Dan's wife's yoga studio that the second cousin of the legendary David Woodward went to and frequented. So we got in contact with him through this odd connection."

As mentioned, Woodward was open to conversations about change. "For him, I think it was a bit of a calling home. He was actually born and raised in Parksville- Qualicum Beach.

We reached out to him and he was certainly curious. And



it quickly snowballed into something a lot more serious, where we were able to bring him on as a partner in the project. He was looking to be a partner in a brewery, and where better than in his hometown. Now he's back closer to his family."

Woodward did have formal brewing training. In fact, he studied and trained in the UK and worked for various breweries overseas before coming back to Canada and working at a brewery in Whistler. Once there, he started building his reputation and finally moved to Victoria, where he started another craft brewery.

Hill was excited about Mount Arrowsmith's good fortunes.

"David has been around brewing professionally in British Columbia for about 15 years. For one, that's tough to find because obviously head brewers are pretty in demand right now. To find one that has this kind of experience is huge. He really exemplifies what you would imagine a true head brewer to be. He's eclectic, thoughtful and passionate about brewing. He's a brewer through-and-through. He's always trying to think outside of the box on how to create new flavours and new beers that really push the palette."

Walking the middle ground between creativity and accessibility is important to Hill and Mount Arrowsmith. He explains, "there's two definite ways that you'll see breweries go now. One is that they are very much hometown



MacDonald

STEEL LIMITED

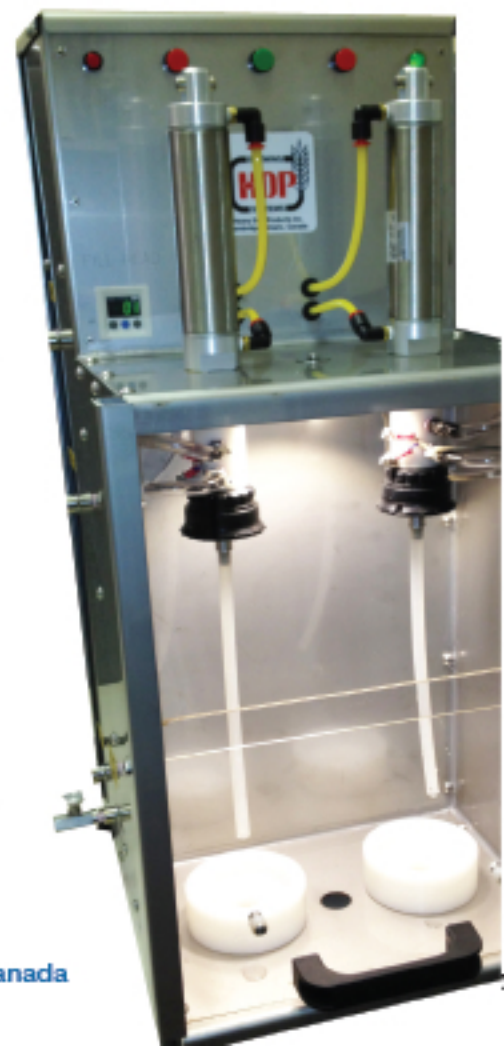
BREWING • MALTING



www.hdpcanada.com
519-620-0500
200 Avenue Road, Cambridge,
Ontario, Canada
Sales@HDPcanada.com

Brewing Systems
Breweries
Filtration
Hop Dosing

Beverage Products
Fillers
Bottle Washers
Nano Carbonation
Brewery Equipment
Pump Carts
Keg Washers
Valves





centric, where they're really focusing on driving traffic to their facility. And that's where their core business model is based. Have a nice large tasting room or lounge with a kitchen — and you don't distribute much."

Hill adds, "another route is to go heavy into the outside distribution. So you're not really as focused on bringing people into your facility as you are getting your beer out to the consumer, whether it's through package products into liquor stores or keg product into restaurants and bars. So what we are trying to do is to find a line in the middle. We didn't want to strictly be a destination brewery. I wanted to see our products in the further reaches throughout the province."

"We knew that Parksville-Qualicum Beach really needed somewhere to go."

Finding the balance also provides the people of Parksville-Qualicum Beach with a much-needed hang-out. Hill explains that the area was in desperate need of a place for multiple generations to go and interact. "We knew that Parksville-Qualicum Beach really needed somewhere to go. There is nowhere here in terms of places for people to go that really attract that younger demographic. And so we wanted to be able to offer that. Again, we try to find the middle ground and I think we have succeeded."

The beer flavours and styles are also a testament to their commitment to accessibility. And not just at home. Hill says they wanted to compete with the big guns and the sophisticated palettes found in larger urban centres. "There's a couple of things that we wanted to accomplish. First we wanted to appeal to a market in places like Victoria and Vancouver, places that are tough to find shelf space. The people who are consuming craft beer in these places are knowledgeable. They know what they want. And a lot of times, they're looking for that next new big thing."

"However, our local market here is a little bit of an older demographic. So we didn't want to alienate anybody, and we wanted to appeal just as much if not more to our local demographic because that definitely is our bread-and-butter. If you can get your local markets to take care of you you can take care of them."

This translated into putting their own mark on beer styles that were familiar to a wider beer-consumer demographic. "We tried to stick with more traditional flavour profile in terms of our original line. We certainly began to push into some new territory, more adventures territory, coming up with some different flavours that aren't necessarily typical with craft breweries. But we also have a more typical IPA and pale ale and blonde ale."

The strategy is definitely working. Awards have been rolling in, including the every sought-after BC Brewery of the year

in 2017. Hill excitedly mentioned, “we only opened our doors in April of last year, so in about six months of operation we went over to the BC Beer Awards and were awarded with a gold medal for our Blonde Ale as the best in British Columbia, a silver medal for our Sea Run Saison, and at the end of the night they also honoured us with the BC Brewery of the Year Award. So it was pretty phenomenal and it was certainly a lot of work to get to that point. We were blown away to be even recognized and amongst some of the best breweries in British Columbia.

“It has been a bit of a whirlwind experience after that, having won that recognition and really getting put on the map. At that point, we hadn’t even thought of pushing our distribution into Vancouver or the lower mainland. A lot of people hadn’t even heard of us at that point, and now I think our name is out there a little bit more and people are catching a bit of brand recognition. So after the awards, instead of having to go around and knock on doors, we are getting people coming to us, asking to stock our beer.”

The price of early success? “I think looking forward we have set the bar pretty high, there’s no doubt about that, so we have to just keep doing what we’re doing. Putting a great beer and focusing on quality.”

Like most craft breweries, community is a main focus for Mount Arrowsmith. Recognizing that the “neighborhood pub experience” is undergoing a true resurgence, Hill wants to ensure that his place becomes a community cornerstone — an old-time gathering place of sorts.

Of course, a major part of being a community leader is realizing that it’s a two-way street. Hill explains that Mount Arrowsmith is on point in this regard. “Along the way, we have tried to give back in every way that we can. We frequently host events, host local live musicians, and many charitable events. In fact, we have one coming up soon

where we will be re-releasing our Sea Run Saison beer with profits going toward ALS research. In conjunction with that, we are going to be hosting events that will support our local ALS walk. So we are definitely trying to give back, and we want to be the spot the people in Parksville know they can go to and meet people and hopefully make a difference in the community.”

So how does a brewery top an award-winning first year? How do they stave off the sophomore jinx? Simply by not looking back.

“Basically, after the award recognition, we kicked into gear our second phase of expansion, which we just finished. We expanded our lounge tasting room facility, we are in the process of adding on the small kitchen right now, we are adding some outdoor seating and we have actually got four brand-new tanks which will allow us to add significantly to our production,” Hill points out.

He adds, “in terms of the future, I’d love to see our product either in cans or in 355 mL bottles, so we’ll see what these new added fermenters will do toward allowing us to do more. We are definitely looking to push our packaged product into different distributing areas.”

Hill is quick to emphasize that, at the end of the day, it’s the good feeling they get from working with family that is most satisfying. “We’re a family run business.

Myself, my cousin, my uncle, my father and my brother have all been a huge part of starting this business. I love the idea of a family run business, and we are working hard to keep the family tradition alive. And all of the staff that we have brought on have definitely become part of our extended family. Our community is excited to know what’s happening here and we enjoy making a difference. We love coming to work. And that doesn’t happen with every job out there. It’s fun. We are very lucky.” ●

