

SAVORING LIFE THROUGH SPIRITS



Still 630



You can tell right from the get-go that Still 630 Distillery owner and distiller David Weglarz was an English major in college. His distillery name has multiple layers of significance and well-thought-out consequence. But the clincher is, his website's business description begins with a quote from William Shakespeare.

"What is in a name?"

The web page goes on to explain that, to Still 630, "the answer to that question is ...a lot. The 'St' and the 'L' represent and reinforce our pride in our hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. The 630 stands for 630 feet tall, which is the height and width of the St. Louis Arch... It symbolizes the pioneer spirit of the men and women who settled the west. To us, it is a symbol of the indomitable spirit of those pioneers. Believe us when we say, we know a thing or two about spirits."

Further to that, Still 630 was founded on June 30th (6/30), the serial number on the pot still they use is #630, and if you peel back the onion, you can probably find a few more clues to the distillery's nomenclature.

Spotlight on Business spoke with David Weglarz about his passion for distilling, the journey to get where Still 630 is today, and the legacy he plans on leaving for future generations to enjoy.

By John Allaire

Speaking with Weglarz, one immediately gets the impression that no stone will be left unturned in his wake. "After college I was a white-water river-rafting guide in the Smokey Mountains.

Then I took the next logical step after that, moved up to Chicago, and became a futures trader," he states with a chuckle. However, eight years of the stock markets and high finance was no laughing matter. "I got really burnt out. And I always wanted to be my own boss, start a company and build a legacy. But I didn't know what the legacy would be. I DID know it wasn't going to be as a futures trader."

Weglarz became frustrated with the "grind." He was watching friends and clients start exciting ventures and build businesses from the ground up. The soul-searching

ended with Weglarz taking solace in an old cliché. "You know, you only live once. And I wanted mine to be incredible. But incredible isn't the same for everyone. Still 630 is MY version of incredible."

A distillery wasn't necessarily the original target for Weglarz.

As he was zeroing in on his version of incredible, he wandered along a winding path that started with the now booming craft brewing movement. "I got turned on to the brewing industry in 2008-09, but it seemed like everybody and their brother was opening up a brewery. But we noticed that people were distilling craft spirits as well. And I thought that was even cooler than beer."

"I always wanted to be my own boss, start a company and build a legacy."

A bit of distilling research and backyard practice brought forth the confidence to go ahead and open up a distilling business. With support at home from his wife and a business plan in hand, Weglarz found an old "gourmet restaurant" (it was actually a fast-food joint in a previous life) in downtown St. Louis and started up operations in 2012. The first products rolled out the door in 2013, and Still 630 has been selling spirits and winning awards ever since.

For someone who was brought up in Michigan, worked in the Carolinas and traded futures in Chicago, Weglarz could've planted his flag anywhere. So why choose to set up camp in the shadow of the Gateway Arch? "Part of the overall plan was, we wanted to start a family. But we didn't think we could do that in downtown Chicago. We wanted a yard and a garage and those types of things... we looked around, but Missouri kind of took the cake because of the more lenient liquor laws."

It's no secret that varying liquor laws across state lines can put undo administrative strain on distilleries and breweries. Case in point, at the time Still 630 was setting up shop, you couldn't operate a distillery in Indiana without owning a working farm license. Weglarz shopped around for a

location that was the best fit with the least red tape. "In Missouri you can operate a distillery, have a tasting room, sell bottles from your tasting room, and you can distribute, with the proper licenses."

Currently, the distillery's distribution footprint includes the greater St. Louis area and a few places in Columbia, Missouri. You can find their spirits in 192 bars, restaurants and liquor stores in the region, and Weglarz points out that they are working at capacity keeping up with their current demand. "We planned to have already expanded by now, but customers are buying up everything we are making as it is. So that's our focus for the moment. But we do plan to expand in the near future." The expansion will include an Illinois-based on-line retailer that will make their spirits available in surrounding states such as Illinois, Indiana and Michigan later in 2018.

St. Louis' central location will surely prove to be advantageous for future product distribution, but that's not all the region has to offer. Weglarz explains that their oak barrels are sourced from some of the best-rated world-class oak, right from their backyard. "One of the biggest things for us is our American Oak barrels. The best American oak in the whole world grows right here." Alongside the Missouri-grown and manufactured oak barrels are the locally made pot stills. Combine all this with fresh Missouri water (once voted best water in the country at a recent mayoral convention) and the amenable St. Louis weather, and the formula for distilling fine spirits is condition-perfect.

The distillery's current focus is on producing whiskey, rum and gin. Weglarz pulls no punches on the reason for concentrating on these spirits. "It's because I'm in charge and that's what I like!"

Arguments should be few and far between because the awards are piling up on Still 630's mantle. In fact, the spirits have won a total of 36 medals in regional and national competitions, including a number of "Best in Class" awards. "We have won the 'Best Rye Whiskey under two years old' for our Rallypoint, we've won the best in category bourbon, alternative spirits... and the list goes on. But in 2016, for the American Craft Spirits Association awards, they chose Double Barrel Rallypoint as the best whiskey in the country!"

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It was chosen over 2,000 different spirits.” It’s little wonder that Rallypoint is their best seller.

Always forward-looking, Still 630 initiates what they call their “Experimental Spirits Program.”

Essentially, it’s a search for new recipes and flavor sensations through mad-scientist-like exlirs and mash-ups. “Yeah!” exclaims Weglarz. “To the best of my knowledge, nobody else is doing this anywhere else in the country. Or at least not on the scope or scale we are.”

Here’s how it works: “I distill a bunch of different spirits and start blending them with different ingredients, in different proportions, into our barrels... just looking for different recipes. We’re trying to find awesome new recipes for wheat whiskeys, and single malts, barrel-aged gin and different bourbons and so on. Basically, everything that isn’t vodka will be in those barrels at some point.”

The brave and the unsuspecting come to the distillery’s “First Fridays” events (yep, you guessed it... held on the first Friday of every month) for the 6:30pm release of the newly concocted spirit. And it’s no small commitment. The distillery plans on releasing one new spirit per month for 5 years! “There’s going to be 60 of these bad boys by the end of this program! It’s a big plan, but it’s been a big hit. Four-and-a-half years to go!”

The feedback from the tasting-room patrons is paramount to the future of these new spirits.

The central idea behind the experiments is to conduct a bit of localized market research right in the distillery. If a particular spirit is a hit, you may see it produced on a larger scale in the future.

“Giving our customers what they want.”

Still 630’s collaborative outreach extends much further than their tasting room. Weglarz explains that they have forged close relationships with many St. Louis businesses and institutions with a view toward building a community of shared enthusiasts for food, spirits and “the finer things St. Louis has to offer.” Some of these relationships result in the development and distilling of a collaborative special spirit. “We work very closely with the Missouri State Botanical Garden, which is here in St. Louis. We are in the process of trying to work out a collaboration spirit with them. And we host many events at the distillery that highlight our various partnerships around town.”

The biggest day of the year at the distillery is, of course, 630 Day (June 30th). That’s the annual event at the distillery where many of their partners come down and offer their products to each other’s clientele in a festive atmosphere. Local coffee, candles, cigars, food and even beard and tattoo oil (who knew?!) all make an appearance on 630 Day. And, naturally, so does a new spirit.

Weglarz’s sense of humor seems to compliment the whole

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“seize and savor” attitude behind the business. He slyly remarks that he’s happy to report the company has tripled in size in 2017.

“There’s three of us now!” he laughs. But staying the course seems to be the name of the game... sort of. They just finished piping and fitting in a new still that has a little more than three times the capacity of their old one. That’s step one. The next step, tentatively slated for mid-2019, is a larger facility with greater capacity.

“We want to keep doing what we’re doing. Just more of it!”