

Community Economic Development

NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Craft Breweries and Community

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A vibrant community has places for people to gather and interact. These social interactions help form bonds, create a sense of community and enhance social capital. Places for community vibrancy can be economic centers, such as a downtown or main street with active shops and restaurants, or social gathering spaces, such as parks and recreation areas. Schools, churches and libraries also provide a setting for community members to visit, talk, play and create social connections.

Many N.H. communities are seeking to revitalize their downtown, create a sense of vibrancy and attract young people while expanding their economic base. Community leaders are looking increasingly to craft breweries as a way to accomplish these goals. Craft breweries have been cited as a tool in revitalizing local economies (Hughes, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Communities work to enhance social connections and create vibrancy by planning for community spaces and the opportunities they provide. The reasoning is that businesses will jump start revitalization and make the community attractive to people and spur further investment.



In New Hampshire, the craft brewery market had an impact of \$353 million in 2016 (Brewers Association, 2016).

According to the Brewers Association, craft breweries are small beer manufacturers that are not owned and/or controlled by a large beer manufacturer. As a group, craft beer accounts for about 3 percent of the total U.S. beer sales annually. As an industry, craft beer is innovative, independent and local (Brewers Association). Craft breweries use creative approaches to connect with customers and demonstrate commitment to their communities through philanthropy, volunteerism and community events (Brewers Association). The majority of New Hampshire’s breweries fall into this description.

The economic benefits of craft breweries are well documented. According to the Brewers Association, in 2016, the craft brewing industry added more than 456,000 jobs (128,000 of which were tied to breweries and brewpubs) and contributed \$67.8 billion dollars to the U.S. economy. In 2016, New Hampshire added 10 new craft breweries (going from 44 to 54), a growth of 22.7percent. The industry grew across the rest of northern New England, with Vermont going from 44 to 50 craft breweries (13.6 percent); Maine from 59 to 77 (30.5 percent) and Massachusetts from 84 to 110 (30.9 percent) (Brewers Association, 2016).

In addition to the economic impact, this study has found that breweries have a strong community impact. Craft breweries create community space and add to community vibrancy.

Investigating Craft Breweries and Community Vibrancy in NH

To investigate the role of New Hampshire craft breweries in creating community vibrancy, this paper draws from a study that was conducted through six interviews with representatives from six different New Hampshire breweries. Representatives from each brewery were either the owner or the head brewer, with some filling both roles. Each interview took place in fall 2017, lasted approximately 30 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. Interview transcriptions were qualitatively analyzed to identify themes. The central themes that emerged from these interviews are relevant for New Hampshire communities interested in having a brewery in their community.

The breweries selected for this study are all considered craft breweries based on the Brewer’s Association definition – because they are innovative, independent, and locally owned. The selection of the six breweries is based on variance in geographic location, type of location and type of operation (Figure 1). Geographically, the breweries are distributed across the state, with breweries located in Carroll, Merrimack, Rockingham, Cheshire and Grafton counties. The communities in which the breweries are located vary in size and most are considered rural. Selections were also based on where each brewery is located in its community in order to investigate any differences between breweries located on Main Street versus an industrial park, rural area or residential or commercial area.

Finally, breweries were selected based on operation type, defined as whether the brewery has a brewpub or a tasting room. There were four brewpubs and two breweries with tasting rooms included in the study.



Name of Brewery	Name of Interviewee	Geographic Location	Type of Location	Type of Operation
Belgian Mare Brewery	Tim Roettiger, owner & head brewer	East Alstead	Rural	Brewery with tasting room
Burnt Timber Brewery & Tavern	Eddie Michno, owner & head brewer	Wolfeboro	Main Street	Brewpub
Henniker Brewing Company	Devin Bush, head brewer	Henniker	Industrial Park	Brewery with tasting room
Rek-Lis Brewing Company	Ian Dowling, co-owner	Bethlehem	Main Street	Brewpub
Schilling Beer Co.	Jeff Cozzens, CEO	Littleton	Main Street	Brewpub
Throwback Brewery	Nicole Carrier, president & co-founder	North Hampton	Residential/ Commercial Development	Brewpub



Key Findings

- Craft breweries add to a community's vibrancy by providing a place for connection and social interaction. This is done around beer and food but also other activities sponsored by the owners of the breweries.
- While breweries have a reputation for attracting young people, this study found that they appeal to families as well. They provide an atmosphere that is comfortable for parents and their children to eat and enjoy social time with others.
- Communities looking to attract a craft brewery to their town should look in their own backyard. People who open craft breweries often start by brewing beer in their own homes and later expand to a commercial space within their town. Breweries are a great addition to a downtown and bring vibrancy to other commercial and industrial locations.
- Craft breweries are connected to place. Many of the brewers opened their business in the community where they already lived. Brewers also value sourcing local ingredients for their beer and the food that they serve.
- In addition to being commercial establishments, craft breweries see themselves as community gathering places. Because they have food in addition to beer, brewpubs are attractive to a wider range of customers and encourage them to stay longer. Tasting rooms also function as gathering spaces, even though customers stay for a shorter amount of time.
- Breweries can be located in a variety of places, not just in a downtown. They bring a sense of community vibrancy because of the beer, the space and the activities that attract people.
- Both locals and visitors frequent craft breweries. For many of the breweries, local people are the primary customer during the week, and visitors typically come to the brewery over the weekend. Visitors may also be seasonal, depending on the geographic location, some breweries experience more visitors during the summer or winter months.
- Because craft breweries are rooted in their community, they find ways to give back. Some host fundraisers or contribute to a local charity of their choice. This connects the brewery owner with others in the community and helps strengthen community ties.



Craft Breweries Are Connected to Place

Craft brewers have a strong sense of place. The ownership of craft breweries is often local and craft breweries are usually started by entrepreneurial home brewers who opt to open a brewery in their community (Reid & Gatrell, 2017). Many of the brewery representatives interviewed had a personal connection to the community where they started the brewery, with the exception of Throwback Brewery and Schilling. The owners of these breweries based their location decision on available space and market conditions, and have since strengthened ties to their respective community.



Many of the brewers interviewed were originally home brewers who transitioned their hobby into a business. Tim Roettiger of Belgian Mare Brewery kept his brewery very close to his home — in fact, he located the brewery on the same property as his home.

Eddie Michno of Burnt Timber Brewing recently transitioned from home brewing in his garage to opening a brewpub in downtown Wolfeboro. “For my wife and I, living in the community for five years, we already had strong social capital in the community we were in,” said Michno. “If we were to open up anywhere else, those relationships we already built, just naturally, through living in town for 5 years, and meeting people at different beer festivals and stuff like that. We already had people that knew us, knew our beer, knew our story.”

Ian Dowling of Rek-lis Brewing in Bethlehem shares similar thoughts about opening in a brewery where he has strong connections. “We’ve lived here for 15 years,” Dowling said. “We’ve done a lot of community volunteer work in town. We started a community garden. My kids went to school here.”

Burnt Timber Brewery & Tavern in Wolfeboro, Rek-Lis Brewing Company in Bethlehem, and Schilling Beer Company in Littleton are located in downtowns or on main streets. The other breweries in this study are in commercial or industrial locations. However, each brewery’s location did not affect its commitment to community or creating community vibrancy.

Locally Sourced Ingredients

Many breweries are proud to source their ingredients locally, which further connects craft breweries and their brewers to the communities in which they’re located. For example, the majority of the food served at Burnt Timber Tavern is procured either from New Hampshire or Vermont. Michno said, “We buy pork from our neighbor who has a 100-acre organic farm next door to us. We try to support local farms and businesses and we market that ... It might cost a little bit more money, but you’re keeping a roof above your neighbor’s head.”

Nicole Carrier of Throwback Brewery said the brewery’s name reflects its connection to place and a desire to source ingredients locally.



“There are a couple of meanings and one is throwback to pre-Prohibition breweries, where they used ingredients that were around them, and their whole mission was to be a community-oriented brewery,” she said. Carrier’s goal is to produce beer with 100 percent locally sourced ingredients. Currently, the brewery obtains food for the restaurant from its on-location farm. In addition, the farm has a small hop yard and works with New England farmers to obtain other beer ingredients.

Craft Breweries as Community Gathering Spaces

To have a healthy life, people need to live in three realms: work, home, and social spaces (Oldenburg, 1999). These social spaces or community gathering spaces are vital for a vibrant community, providing a space for people to come together, socialize, and establish a sense of place. The brewery representatives interviewed see their breweries as a place to gather while enjoying beer and also make their space available for other community activities.

Eddie Michno describes Burnt Timber Brewing and Tavern as a small 24-seat restaurant with high-top tables, a cozy seven-foot bar, and a line of smaller low tables along a wall with bench seating. There are games out on the tables. “The way that I think about our taproom in the way people have been using it, it’s kind of a nighttime coffee shop,” he said. “We have created this environment where people come and hang out and they might drink a glass of wine and then sit around and play cards for an hour.”



“We act as a gathering place for people of many backgrounds and interests,” said Jeff Cozzens of Schilling Beer Company in Littleton. “Besides our artisan beers and food, our location, building and atmosphere are unique in northern New Hampshire.”

Many of the breweries also describe having activities and events at the brewery. These include yoga, live music, a book club, games and beer release events.

“We do yoga every Sunday. It’s just \$5 that goes to the instructor, and it’s before we open, but we figure we have this beautiful space, might as well offer something to our community,” said Carrier. “Some people stay, so we benefit, but for the most part, we’re offering something of good value to people.”

Breweries Draw People of All Ages — Not Just Young People

It may come as a surprise that the brewery representatives described a range of demographics among their customers. From young families with children to older adults and from locals to visitors, a wide range of individuals visit craft breweries.

According to Devin Bush of Henniker Brewing in Henniker, “The demographics are spread out for us across the board,” he said. “You get young people coming over from New England College in Henniker to older demographics who are camping in the summer. In a single Saturday, we’ll see people who are 21 all the way to 75 or 80 years old.”

Many brewery representatives interviewed were proud that their breweries are family friendly. “I would best describe us as a family-oriented brewery,” said Nicole Carrier of Throwback Brewery in North Hampton. “In the summer, we have kids playing soccer in the field, checking out the animals we have on the farm. Our core customer is families with kids, but there are a lot of people all over the map.”



Michno describes his brewpub as “really casual so it doesn’t feel like it’s a sit down restaurant where your kid needs to be on their best behavior.” The craft breweries are welcoming to all groups and ages.

Locals and Visitors Mix for the Success of a Brewery

The brewers also said that both locals and visitors frequent their breweries. During the week, customers tend to be locals, and two of the brewers said they have “regulars,” or people who frequent the brewery often. During the weekends, the crowd flips to visitors and tourists. “Beer tourism is a real thing,” said Carrier. “We always get people on Saturdays and Sundays visiting from other parts of the country, and sometimes other parts of the world.”

Breweries Are Just One Stop in a Community Visit

The brewers described drawing visitors to the area as another way that their brewery affects the community. Henniker Brewing Company operates under a beverage manufacturer license. The brewery does not serve food, and thus, according to New Hampshire state law, cannot serve pints of beer. Because of this, Bush described the brewery as being geared to visitors who would like to sample beers rather than a community gathering space where people might gather to enjoy a pint or two.

While the brewery does not serve as a community gathering space for locals, it does bring vibrancy to the community in another way. “I think the biggest impact we have within the community of Henniker is actually driving people to the town,” Bush said. “I do tastings around the state at liquor stores, restaurants, and I hear from people [who say,] ‘I’ve never been to Henniker, I’m going to go.’” When people come to the taproom, staff at the brewery refer them to restaurants or other attractions, which drives business to the downtown.



Roettiger shared the same sentiment. “Being as small as we are, events aren’t really something we can do with our small space, co-location with our home, and having the brewery off-the-grid.” However, he explained that his brewery provides a draw for people from outside of the area. “We get a lot of customers from further east, from Vermont, a lot from Massachusetts,” he said. “Many of them first-timers. Brewery passports have been very good for the business.”

Dowling described the impact that Rek-lis Brewing has on the community of Bethlehem. “Moving downtown with high visibility, you can already see it’s adding to the town,” said Dowling. “There’s a lot of traffic on Route 302, but no one stops. The brewery will get people to stop and start to see all the other things the town has to offer, for locals, tourists and folks in the region.”



Craft Breweries Give Back to their Communities

Because brewers have a strong connection to place and a sense of community pride, they often find ways to give back. All of the brewery representatives interviewed have contributed to charities and/or hosted fundraisers, or plan to do so in the future. Examples of charitable activities include toy drives, fundraisers for individuals, charity brews, a road race to raise money for families with children with cancer and direct contributions to organizations.

“We have a philosophy that promotes fitness, outdoor activities, and fun,” said Dowling. “If you come from a charity that focuses on those things, we support them. For example, the trail association in Bethlehem, we’ll help support them financially and physically. Their meetings will be taking place at the new brewery location.”

Breweries like Schilling Beer Co. often find multiple ways to give back. “We have raised money for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, have assisted individuals and families with medical bills, and we recently helped raise \$15,000 for a Trout Unlimited’s Trout Camp for kids. We also run an annual charity associated with our Oktoberfest each September, and have organized St. Baldrick’s Foundation events that raise money to fight childhood cancers,” said Cozzens.



Other Considerations for Having a Brewery in Your Community

As with any local economic development strategy, business diversity is key and having a brewery is one part of the equation. It is important to consider the type of brewery and the location to understand the impact a craft brewery will have.

The brewery representatives interviewed had generally positive experiences working with municipalities. Like other businesses, it can be challenging to navigate the review and regulatory procedure at the municipal level. Brewers found that municipalities did not understand brewery operations. Questions of location, noise, water, and parking will vary by brewery.

Michno said, “A lot of these new breweries popping up — a lot of these towns don’t understand breweries.” There is opportunity to learn from other municipalities who have previously been through the municipal approval process with a brewery.



Community leaders interested in attracting a brewery to their city or town have many municipal assets and resources to consider. These include zoning, water quality, wastewater, power, parking and infrastructure.

Conclusion

Craft breweries are adding to the vibrancy of New Hampshire’s communities in a variety of ways. When combined with other businesses and civic initiatives, they can have a profound effect — especially in areas needing revitalization. Breweries are social spaces for discussion, meeting people, making connections and having fun. The good news is that, in general, breweries are grown locally and give back locally — a win for the business and the community.

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