

By Rachel Ruhl

Staying the course

North Carolina microbrew opts
for contemporary drainage



When it comes to craft beer, Emily Murray likes to shoot straight. “Craft beer isn’t just about beer. It’s about the people you meet and the memories created over a brew.”

Emily knows a thing or two about the microbrew environ, and what happens when folks set aside a bit of time to be with friends, or even those they don’t know, to enjoy a tankard of ale, beer, mead or cider—all products brewed at her business.

Last year, Emily and her husband, Seth, opened SideTracked Taproom in Morganton, North Carolina in response to a burgeoning interest in craft beer. The name stems from their location: Patrons find them, and quench their thirst, at the “sidetracked” area near the historical train depot. Emily and Seth are co-owners of the business, and at 24 years of age, they’re the youngest brewery owners in North Carolina, and possibly the nation.



taken from a nearby track as a foot rest for customers at the bar.

They did so well through last year that they decided to open a for-real microbrew operation of their own—stepping out ambitiously with a five-barrel system capable of 130 gallons per batch. They have three copper brewing tanks and four fermenters where the brews mature over a period of two to four weeks.

The name of every brew at SideTracked is tied to the railroad theme. Luckily, they have two regulars—Nadine and Jenni—who've owned and operated railroads. Both have offered to help with the names.

Other customers have enjoyed the aesthetics of the railroad theme, so it's not uncommon to see old photos and historic memorabilia, brought in as gifts to be shared. "We're enjoying a connection with the community we never dreamed of," Emily says.

"We're the third microbrewery in a small town," Emily says. "That seems just right to us, though it might seem unusual to others."

And just in time, too.

"It's expected that Western Piedmont Community College, here in town, will soon become a university," Emily says. "We also learned that 60 apartments will be built right across the street, and a new math and science school—for high schoolers, but with an all-new faculty and staff, and the parents of students—will be constructed a few blocks from here."

If ever there was a made-to-order population boom, suitable for microbrew growth, it's happening in Morganton. But just in case owners of another microbrew get ideas, Emily and Seth have closely studied the growth potential, too. "Though we've grown quickly, we're now used to construction and what's involved—and the thought of expanding has a nice flavor to it."

All aboard!

Emily and Seth designed the Taproom with the train theme in mind. Seth's ability to combine creativity and engineering turned into a wide range of train-themed furnishings: heavy timber-and-train track iron tables and stools, and repurposed gauges and an old steam whistle, too. They used rail

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— Emily Murray, co-founder, SideTracked Taproom



New construction leads to drainage

The couple studied many options for brewery design prior to commissioning their latest expansion project. One facet of the project was one they hadn't considered initially: drainage.

In a brewery, it becomes an important consideration. The art of crafting beer consumes a fair amount of water. Good water is needed to make good beer, and no small quantity of it is used to clean up the brewery after mixing each batch of brew, too.

And they learned that a lot of water is used to clean drains—unnecessarily.

In the research phase, it was apparent that all drains aren't equal. Some require a lot of flush water; others do not. Ultimately, their research led them to the Dead Level® trench drain system from Watts, with stainless steel grates.



"The reviews for Watts were all positive. I spoke to several brewery owners who recommended their product as well," Seth says.

Seth ended up speaking with John Sher, owner of Sher Plumbing, also based in Morganton. "John said he hadn't yet installed Dead Level trench drains, so he checked it out online and had a favorable impression," Seth says. "He bought the drains we needed at a nearby supply house and then we got to work retrofitting an old concrete floor to accommodate the drain."

Seth says working with Sher was a great experience. "Trench drain adjustments are too often a hit-or-miss effort," Sher says. "We were able to adjust height and slope for these drains with no trouble. I also especially liked that the stainless steel grate was standard—not an upgrade. And the factory's protective spill cover kept concrete and other debris out of the drain through the entire construction phase; I really liked that, too. I look forward to my next installation of Dead Level."

Now installed and in use, Seth says they drain effortlessly and quickly. That means most

of the water we use goes into our recipes; not wasted for clean-up. The addition of the Dead Level trench drains, located near the tanks, enables Seth to clean and sanitize the tanks with little effort.

Brewmeister

Newest aboard the Murray's staff is Joseph Ackerman. He's been a professional brewer for the past seven years and was the first craft beer brewer in Columbia, South Carolina. He studied at the Siebel Institute of Technology in Chicago and is now hard at work crafting the company's new, signature brews.

The first beer developed by the trio is called "6.1.1." The German "deft bier" is a steam ale named for the last steam engine that came through Morganton. A photo of the big engine hangs on the Taproom's wall.



Next was named "Thom-as the Dank Engine"—a moniker given by Nadine and Jenni for a fresh and piney New England IPA. "This one's got a very hazy look to it, and a lot of hops," Emily says.

They've also got their new hefeweizen, named Weisbon—a flavorful wheat beer.

Ackerman developed each recipe and is ready to brew many new sours, imperial stouts, IPAs and

some lighter beer options, including different hefeweizens and blondes.

"Everyone will be able to find a brew at SideTracked that suits their fancy," Emily says.

Emily says their plan is to use mostly local sourced ingredients; she and Seth plan to source as much of their ingredients as possible from the community, and to promote other local businesses. They give back to the community, too. At SideTracked, they brew a different beer for a charity at least once a month and donate most of the money from that beer to local charities.

"This is all about community, and creating a unique environment for people to enjoy with family, friends and colleagues," Emily says. "We create the setting and serve drinks that satisfy and inspire. The rest happens from the goodness of our patrons. We can't ask for more than that, can we?" **CK**

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