



Hops mania

Why something is always brewin' at Triskelion

By John Vastyan

There may be something in the water in North Carolina that's driving its residents to beer. Travel across the state and you'll bump into one of its 257 microbreweries. In fact, the state now ranks eighth nationally for the number of microbreweries, and fifth in year-to-year growth—topping \$2 billion in revenue a few years ago.

Think of it: North Carolina's hops-brewing enterprises now produces more than 1,300,000-plus barrels of beer annually. That's five gallons of beer for every person over the age of 21.

Enter Triskelion (pronounced "triss-kill-ee-on") Brewing, one of the fastest-growing microbrew enterprises in North Carolina. Triskelion (www.triskelionbrewing.com) is located in Hendersonville, 75 miles west of Charlotte.

A triskele, or triskelion, is an ancient Celtic symbol that includes three symmetrically-joined spirals. The brewery's logo shows the triple-spiral design, now representing the three crucial beer ingredients: water, barley and hops.

Young entrepreneurs and co-owners/brewers Jonathan and Becky Ayers are as passionate about the new facility as they are about new blends. And with a growing customer base, they're also developing a great social media following.

And let's not forget about that brewery. "Every detail about our facility was been planned from the beginning," Jonathan says. "A few years ago, we



started with a blank slate, creating a dream with no constraints. Today, I'm pinching myself; I can't be sure I'm not still dreaming.

The couple just completed construction of two new structures—the brewhouse and the taproom. “The brewhouse is about as automated as you can get without being a large brewery,” Jonathan says. “The computer automation saves me countless hours of guesswork. It gives me the time to develop and refine [beer] recipes. Even our water and drainage systems are state-of-the-art.”

In the 2,400-square-foot brewhouse, there are seven barrel fermenters that produce up to 14 barrels of beer each day. The system also allows for major expansions down the road.

“As we got close to construction time in early '17, we changed our plan of having one combined building for the both brewhouse and taproom,” Jonathan says. “Ultimately, we decided to make sure the brewhouse was completed first, with a tasting room right inside the brewhouse.”

The experiment worked. Appreciative customers enjoyed their experiences so well that Jonathan and Becky couldn't help wondering: Should we have built a bigger place?

Oasis, with beer

The tasting room had 12 taps, all of which were moved into the new taproom facility. Outside is the biergarten, which Becky says has a contemporary look and design. “We want customers to feel like they're on a rooftop bar—a lofty experience with loads of fresh air and plenty of great beer.”

The taproom offers 2,500 square feet on the lower level and additional 1,800 square feet upstairs. Each level has 30-plus taps. The downstairs is where the main taproom space includes a small stage; the upstairs offers a separate bar and space for overflow.

Long before Triskelion was conceptualized, Jonathan and Becky were home-brewers for a decade. Jonathan worked for more than 20 years in construction, so that added tremendously to his ability to bring (then) wannabe brewer's dream into reality.

The brewery began with very deliberate planning, sketches and research. In those early years, Jonathan also attended college and aced classes while earning a General Brewing Certificate, Cicerone Certification Certified Beer Server and Beer Steward certification, among others.

When they finally saw the opportunity to buy a property, well-suited to the



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location of a microbrewery, they jumped. “We were so fortunate,” Jonathan recalls.

The empty lot sat in the middle of the town’s then-struggling historic district, offering a unique opportunity for the development of the new, modern gem that Triskelion has become. It helps immensely that the area is experiencing a Renaissance—now unshackling its old stigma as a once-dangerous, depressed neighborhood.

The area has evolved into a thriving business center with two breweries and multiple places to eat. The other brewery in the area is Southern Appalachian Brewery.

“The more [breweries], the merrier,” Becky says. “Fortunately, folks who enjoy craft beer enjoy variety. And, typically, they move around among friends—like friendship on the roam. And it also helps a lot that we’re on friendly terms with the owners and managers of the other brewery.”

All in the details

Some of the most important decisions gave the Ayers a foundation for their future there. Jonathan says few would have guessed that those most-important decisions had to do with building infrastructure, drainage and water conservation. Today, these issues are the

focus of new state and federal regulations, very difficult and expensive to implement as a retrofit, yet easy on the front-end.

Jonathan refers to it as “spending money on the backbone.” By that he means the equipment, products and technology around which all facets of their operation are built: like systems that prevent water loss or improve water quality.

“As we planned, we spoke with a lot of microbrew owners,” he says. “The name ‘Watts’ kept coming up, so we looked further. Among other things, we learned that they had drain systems that fully resisted the challenge of acidic, ingredient and residue-rich or super-hot drainage. For instance, some of our new drains have collection baskets, easily removed after draining loads of hops effluent.”

After speaking with Daniel [Daniel Clyburn, with Charlotte-based manufacturer’s rep firm, Smith & Stevenson, and Watts sales manager, Jimmy Hunt, they decided their OneWatts, single-source provider

The Ayers are developing a brewing study scholarship fund to help students at nearby Blue Ridge Community College.

program made great sense to us. So they purchased every technology they could from them.

“The idea also sounded good to Scott and Phillip Duncan, owners of Rutherfordton, North Carolina-based Duncan Plumbing, who they chose to do all the plumbing work.

The solutions installed at Triskelion for the brewhouse, fermentation and packaging rooms, the taproom and outside bar included:

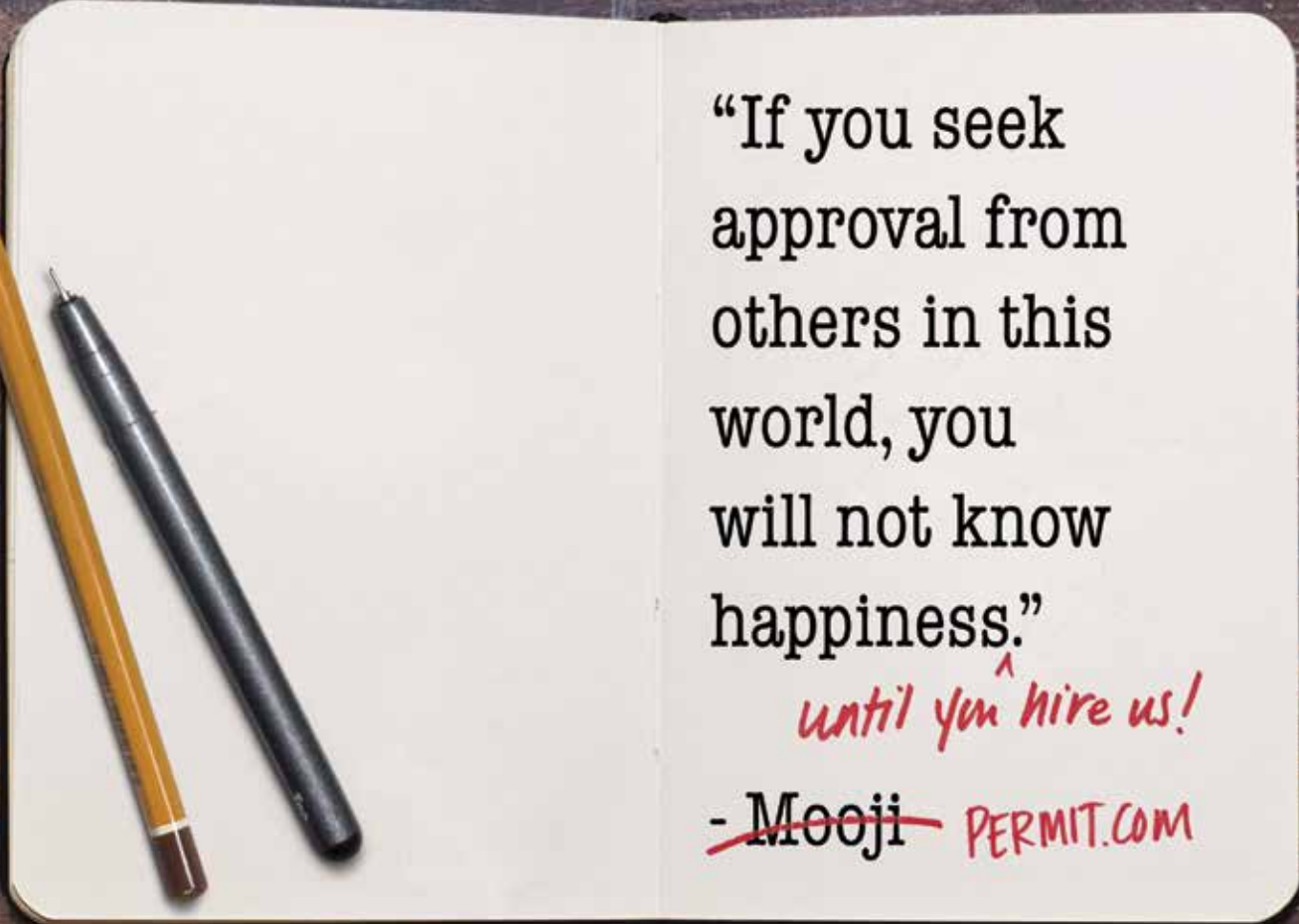
Process wastewater systems—Three separate HygienicPro trench drains: a total of 75 feet. One is in the brewhouse and the others have roles in the fermentation and packaging areas. These feed into 80 feet of push-fit stainless steel BLÜCHER pipe under the brewhouse because of the need to dump high-temp (180 degrees F) slurry into it—way too acidic for iron, and too hot for composite.

Process water supply—Carbon water filtration cartridges were installed on the city water line feeding the brew house (each lasts three to four months and cost only \$8 to replace, and can be bypassed for washing), and the water supply for the new taphouse.

Gas supply—A Dormont stainless steel gas connector is attached to the brewery’s tankless (domestic) water heater.

Sanitary drains—25 feet of DeadLevel composite trench drain was installed behind the main taproom bar, with stainless steel grate for easy cleaning. Also, there’s a BLÜCHER WaterLine channel, mini-trench drain for the outside bar.





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What's brewing

Jonathan admits he's a lager fan. But that doesn't get in the way of putting those 30-plus taps to good use, with loads of variety to meet their customers' wildly differing interests and tastes.

In addition to the lagers, Triskelion now offers more than a few IPAs, an ESB, a Scotch Ale, pale ales, and then some. "I really like digging into brewing history, and lean toward some of the old styles, combining them with newer styles, techniques, and ingredients to create entirely new beers," he says.

For example, they have one beer that's a fusion of an old Norwegian style beer with a modern-day IPA.

The colors of success

At Triskelion, inspiration in the craft brewing trade also has an artistic side. Outside-of-the-box thinkers that they are, the Ayers decided to colorize their craft when they painted the facilities with a little-known "beer hue standards" theme (the Standard Reference Method, abbreviated as SRM, is the color system used by brewers to specify finished beer and malt color).

It's an esoteric that only brewers are typically familiar with but why not incorporate some of the colors into their painting scheme? "All

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exterior colors line up with known SRMs for Imperial Porter brown, IPA orange, pale ale yellow, and foamy white," Jonathan says.

Inside, they have three greens for hops colors: hops cone, leaf and vine stem. The colors also make sense in that finished beer colors are on the outside and inside: the beer ingredients.

Giving back

Jonathan and Becky are developing a brewing study scholarship fund to help students at nearby Blue Ridge Community College. "It's an exploding field of study, and BRCC's courses are excellent and expanding. They're helping to train the next generation of brewers," Jonathan says.

So, for students—including a growing number of women in the industry—Triskelion's pros will help train them. And for those who excel at the craft, they also could win scholarship funds and internship opportunities there.

At the school, students are currently learning what it takes to be a brewery sellerman (aka "yeast wrangler"), packaging or quality control experts, brewer's assistant, shift brewers, assistant brewers and head brewers.

Who'd have thought so much can go into that malty beverage so many American's simply take for granted? **CK**

John Vastyan is president of Common Ground and a senior contributor for *Commercial Construction & Renovation* magazine.