

Guess what? You can brew beer in Mississippi

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KILN—What do you get when you cross an electrical engineer, a chemical engineer and a home beer brewing kit?

The answer: Lazy Magnolia — Mississippi's only legal beer brewery.

With two Bronze Awards in categories at the 2006 World Beer Cup competition, the Lazy Magnolia Brewing Company has come a long way since Leslie Henderson bought her husband Mark that home beer brewing kit for Christmas.

After one brew, Leslie, the chemical engineer of the family, took over and before long, their home was filled with five gallon glass containers and buckets of brewing beer.

"They invited friends over to sample their beer," said Matt McKiernan, the company's marketing director and first real employee.

Well, their friends liked it, and after a painstakingly long process of research and meetings with lawyers who told them it was against the law to operate a brewery in Mississippi, Mark and Lisa founded the company in 2003.

"There is a longstanding belief that you can't legally run a brewery in Mississippi," McKiernan said. "But they read the law themselves, and it's just not there."

The key's not the brewing. It's the selling.

In Mississippi, you can brew beer, but you can't sell it to individuals or bars yourself. Beer is sold to distributors, who then sell it to bars, restaurants and grocery and

convenience stores—just like liquor has to be sold to the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control division, which then taxes and sells it.

To learn more about the craft of beer brewing, Louisville native Leslie entered the American Brewers Guild Brewing School in July 2003, followed by an apprenticeship at the Crescent City Brewhouse in 2004. While his wife was in school, Mark was hard at work developing a business plan, performing market research, securing financing and searching for just the right location for the company, according to McKiernan. Mark, originally from Cleveland, is also the artist who designed the company's magnolia logo.

In 2004, the couple secured a building and began filling it with new equipment that would allow their beer batches to increase from five gallons to 500.

The first batch of beer was brewed on the Lazy Magnolia system in January 2005, and the first kegs of beer hit the market on the Gulf Coast in March of that year. In August, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the couple's home, and stopped production—but only for a couple of months.

The company was forced to move into more viable markets like Cleveland and Jackson in the aftermath of the hurricane—turning tragedy into something positive.

Named for the Magnolias that grow along the Jourdan River near here, the company has since grown to four full-time and two part-time employees. It produces five regular beers, as well as two seasonal recipes, which are packaged on site in kegs and "party pigs" and sold to distributors throughout Mississippi. One additional recipe, "Harvest Moon Reb Ale," is brewed for, and marketed only in Oxford.

Mark and Leslie are always trying new recipes, with at least one new beer now in the development stage. Their recipes strive to be uniquely Mississippi—their Southern Pecan nut brown ale boasts it's the "only beer in the world made with whole roasted



Lazy Magnolia Marketing Director Matt McKiernan (left) and Owner Leslie Henderson stand in front of fermentation vessels filled with brewing beer. —Photo by Perkins

pecans"—at least to their knowledge.

The winter seasonal—Jefferson Stout—uses sweet potatoes to get its unique flavor, while Indian Summer is spiced with orange peel and coriander.

Other products include their Amberjaque rye ale, Par 3 American wheat ale, Blue Heron, which is a European-style filtered wheat ale, and their summer seasonal, Lighthouse Pale Ale.

According to McKiernan, Lazy Magnolia also moved in to the Mobile and Florida Panhandle markets this year.

He said that before the company moves into a new market, Leslie researches the market and calculates the company's ability to expand. "She's the one who tells me, 'Okay, we can do that,'" he said.

And, with growing success comes the

need for more diversity.

The company has purchased a bottling line, and plans are to begin bottling beer by the end of the year. "We have a bottling line on site. We just have to assemble it and get it up and running," McKiernan said.

That could mean Lazy Magnolia's signature Southern Pecan could be on local grocery and convenience store shelves by the beginning of 2008.

The company gives regular tours of its brewery every Saturday morning that take visitors through the brewing process, from recipe to fermentation to packaging.

No sampling, however. That is against the law in Mississippi.

For more information on Lazy Magnolia, visit their website at www.lazymagnolia.com.