

CRAFT

Wisconsin Brewing Company Plans for Sustained Growth

BREWING

In 1978, Kirby Nelson was introduced to the brewing industry as a lab technician at G. Heileman Brewing. During this time, G. Heileman was expanding quite a bit, which meant new breweries were being purchased and a variety of career opportunities were being created. This prospect excited Nelson. However, as he began to progress in his brewing career, he soon ran into a multitude of problems when he was asked to set up the quality assurance department at a recently acquired brewery in central Florida. “The brewery was a complete disaster,” Nelson stated, “That brewery was broke from A to Z.”

While his initial excitement had faded, Nelson continued to delve into finding out how he could fix the array of problems the central Florida brewery was facing. As he began to solve the brewery’s problems, he started to enjoy learning more about the process of making beer. This sparked an interest in becoming more involved in the industry. Nelson took a position at a new brewery, where he was then promoted to the position of brewmaster, which is the supervisor of brewing operations. At this new brewery, Nelson met brothers Carl and Mark Nolen. As the three grew in their craft, they began to wonder about creating their own brewery.

In 2013, Kirby established Wisconsin Brewing Company (WBC) with the help of Carl and Mark Nolen. Again, Nelson’s brewing journey was met with challenges. The biggest challenge Nelson and WBC had to overcome was the perceptions of craft brew drinkers. Often times, craft breweries start off as a small operation, which seemed to give them a sense of credibility and passion. Because WBC started off on a much larger scale, Nelson feared that craft beer drinkers would not see their company as stemming from passion like the smaller breweries. While this may have been a big hurdle for some, Nelson decided to press. “We decided

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we believe in the industry, we believe in ourselves, and we believe that craft is going to keep growing, so we decided to build for success.”

In order to achieve sustained growth, Nelson began to think, “We would love to be able to hit a quarter of a million barrels someday. What is the best way to initially put this place together to achieve that goal?” He also needed to decide what fundamental elements the brewery would need, without too much difficulty, deconstruction, or huge costs. Nelson decided that investing in quality equipment was the most important aspect. This meant the company would need quality pumps to transfer their products. “Quite frankly, making beer is all about moving liquid, so I started going to nothing but Fristam Pumps.” Since then, he has been a loyal customer of Fristam. Nelson explained that the main things he looks for in a pump supplier were reliability, quality service, and durability.

In WBC’s first year of operation, they brewed 4,266 barrels of beer. Because of their planning toward sustained growth and high quality equipment, WBC is currently producing 21,000

barrels of beer annually. The company now plans to expand production by adding a can filling system into their current building as well.

Because of his positive experience with Fristam Pumps, Nelson continues to use their pumps at WBC. In the brewery, Fristam’s FPX centrifugal pumps are used to transfer beer, hot water, and wort, because of their high efficiency and gentle product handling. WBC also uses Fristam’s FZX liquid ring pumps to transfer beer into their keg filler. Nelson recommends that anyone looking to create a brewery or any production facility, invests in equipment that is long-lasting and efficient. He added, “You want a piece of equipment that is going to be as efficient as possible, that’s not going to break down, that’s reasonably priced, that’s going to give you high quality, and is going to give you years and years of service. That’s why I’ve become sold on Fristam, because it has always delivered on all those accounts and never let me down.”

To see Kirby’s full interview go to: www.fristam.com/brew

