

## **Business Member Profile** **Victory Brewing Company**

Time for a Cold One!

*By Gayle Morrow*

Though they've known each other since Methacton High School in Montgomery County in 1973, Victory Brewing is Bill Covaleski and Ron Barchet's first business venture together - not counting Junior Achievement.

It seems, however, to be a successful pairing – a bit like hops and barley ...

It was a “typical business start-up,” says Covaleski, one that involved borrowing capital from friends and family and securing the “blessings of our wives.” He explains that Barchet had worked for a time with Baltimore Brewing, and then went to Germany for brewing training at the Technical University of Munich at Weihenstephan. His departure left a space at Baltimore Brewing, which Covaleski filled. The two put together a business plan in 1993-94, following up with the opening of a 150-seat restaurant and microbrewery in a Downingtown facility, which had been home to a Pepperidge Farm bakery. Use of that building was the ultimate in recycling, Covaleski says, and a move, which the two “feel very good about.” Downingtown is a former paper mill town, he continues, “so we have the water infrastructure.” As for the restaurant end of things, “neither one of us had a lot of restaurant experience, but we felt it was a critical component.” The original menu focused on hearth-baked pizza and real hickory-smoked barbeque (naturals with beer!) but has evolved and expanded over the years.

And now? Award-winning Victory Brewing bottles six beers yearlong and augments its flagship brands (beers like Golden Monkey, Moonglow Weizenbock, and Old Horizontal) with seasonal brews. There are 20 taps in the restaurant, with the beers changing on a weekly and bi-weekly basis.

“There is definitely a schedule and a plan to how the beers roll out,” says Covaleski. “It is exciting to our audience.”

“We are conscientious of the season and what our customers want,” says Barchet.

The product is a European quality beer, so some of the raw ingredients are not sourced locally. The beer's largest single ingredient, the water, is, and Victory Brewing is working with some regional hop growers in PA and NY to develop markets here. For the restaurant, the two have made a concerted effort to buy fresh, buy local. The pork and chicken is from Pennsylvania, the eggs are local, and they are integrating local produce into the menu.

As consumers are learning the benefits and values of food that is regionally produced and sold, so are they learning the same about their favorite pint.

“People can bring in their growlers to be refilled,” says Covaleski, adding that customers are appreciative of their “proximity to local, fresh beer.”

“We produce high-quality beers on site, backed up with locally sourced food,” he says. “It is a winning combination. We feel very fortunate we are where we are. We are part of the fabric of Chester County. We encourage people to try more locally produced beers. The freshness and diversity of flavor will win them over.”

*For more information about Victory Brewing, check out [www.victorybeer.com](http://www.victorybeer.com) or call 610-873-0881.*

**What is unique about your business?**

We make unique and flavorful beers of all natural ingredients in an industry where 95% of sales are industrial products. Only 5% of the nation cares about what we do (craft beers). In order to succeed we must make both our products and our story resonate with the local community in which we operate. It's a fun challenge and we have been rewarded with an adventurous and loyal audience. We are challenged to service this audience over large footprint (28 states and the UK) and in many unique environments, like our own 300 seat restaurant. Meanwhile, our revenues return to our home of Chester County allowing us to grow our business in a manner that most benefits our local community.

**Why did you join PASA?**

We share the ideals that PASA and its members manifest.

**How has your membership been a benefit to your business?**

PASA membership has provided us with a tangible link to the others who are endeavoring to uphold sustainability in their business practices. We gain encouragement, insight and camaraderie from our fellow members and that sustains our drive to excel.

**What does the term "sustainable" mean to you and how do you incorporate that into your business?**

Sustainability will remain specific to each individual operation. For instance, our investment in an energy-efficient brew house that recovers 75% of the primary energy requirements is a huge step in the energy-demanding business of brewing that would not capture such dramatic results for a different business. We have also raised our energy efficiency and conservation standards to minimize our carbon footprint. So we look at the big picture of carbon emissions and resource preservation and we take the practical steps to eventually reach the larger goals.

**What do you see as some of the critical issues facing agriculture and ag-related businesses today?**

We are fortunate to be in Chester County where locally produced products have found an enthusiastic audience. This proximity to a large consuming audience brings with it the competition for land as an agricultural resource. Intelligent land management remains the most critical issue in assuring that our foods can remain locally grown. As a brewery, we have always been behind stewardship of the local watershed and we see this issue increasing as a potential impact to all stakeholders. We also see challenges convincing hop farmers to grow the lower-yielding but higher-quality aroma hops that are essential to our beer. Many farmers think their risks are lower if they grow bittering hops, which are sold as a commodity, where quality is a secondary consideration.

**What do you see as the connection between sustainable ag and the consumer?**

Oxygen feeds the body and mind more than any foodstuff can. Therefore, productive open space contributes to consumers' well being in a critical manner. Consumers need to appreciate and nurture their relationship with their territory. Flavorful local products can help make that connection in the mind of consumers who might never have thought about local value before they had that taste.