



Success Story

Yes, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Lazy Magnolia: From the Backyard to the Brewery

Tucked away on the back roads of Hancock County, Mississippi's first brewery is operating at full steam. The Lazy Magnolia Brewery has made it onto the beer map as a market contender, not to mention they are second only to FEB Distributing's anchor brands (Miller/Coors) in sales. The owners and visionaries behind the operation are Mark and Leslie Henderson, native Mississippians.

Mark was born in Cleveland, Miss. and raised in Waynesboro, Miss., and Leslie was born and raised in Louisville, Miss. This dynamic pair met in college at Mississippi State while both were pursuing Engineering degrees. After marrying in 1997, Leslie gave Mark a home-brewing kit for Christmas one year, which sparked the beginning of their entrepreneurship.

Leslie and Mark soon became so enamored with brewing their own creations that their friends and family encouraged them to take their hobby to the professional level. Leslie studied at the American Brewers Guild Brewing School in 2003, while Mark worked on formulating a business plan and logo and conducting market research on operating a brewery in Mississippi.

Like all startup businesses, they encountered resistance to their business plan, especially concerning financing the operation. As Mark put it, "Commercial bankers can understand a restaurant business plan: they have seen a lot of them, and they know what it takes to make them successful, but trying to open a brewery in Mississippi, well to that they just chuckle." Leslie and Mark eventually took matters into their own hands and crashed a party hosted by Leslie's boss, placing a bottle of Southern Pecan into the hands of a banker from Whitney Bank. He loved the beer and their idea so much he set them up with a loan to pursue their business.

Just as they were settling into their production facility in the Kiln, Hurricane Katrina struck. Like most Coast businesses, they were shut down for six weeks, as Marines took over the facility to lead the effort to get supplies into the surrounding area. Power was restored by October and according to Leslie, "Every cloud has a silver lining. As a result of Katrina, we were presented with an opportunity to buy used brewing equipment from a local salvage company, which allowed us to grow with the Coast."

Since Katrina, business has been booming and Lazy Magnolia has seen a growth rate of 100 percent each year. In its first year, Lazy Magnolia produced 580 barrels; this year it produced nearly 5,000; and the target for 2009 is 10,000. A company that began in the backyard of its only two original employees has now expanded into two warehouses, nine employees and a logo that has a growing fan-base. And future plans involve spreading into Texas, Georgia, Tennessee and other new states. Ultimately, the Henderson's goal is to produce 100,000 barrels per year with 70 to 100 employees.

As Lazy Magnolia continues to grow and expand, so will its popularity with beer drinkers. Lazy Magnolia has grown from a hobby, to an idea, into an increasingly expanding company. And just like the Magnolia tree from whence it got its name, it looks like it will be here for the long run.



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