

Name of Interviewee: Tony Ammendolia
Date of Interview: August 29, 2018
Name of Interviewer: Theresa McCulla
Length of Interview: 00:38:26 minutes

Theresa McCulla: It's August 29, 2018. This is Theresa McCulla of the National Museum of American History. I am interviewing Tony Ammendolia, owner and founder of Original Gravity and brewer at Final Gravity Brewing Company. We are meeting at the brewery in Richmond, Virginia, and this interview is part of the American Brewing History Initiative, a project to document and collect the history of beer and brewing in America. So, Tony, when and where were you born?

Tony Ammendolia: I was born in, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in 1970.

McCulla: And, what were your parents' names?

Ammendolia: Anthony Ammendolia and Janice Ammendolia.

McCulla: And what did they do?

Ammendolia: Yeah, my father was in the army. And retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. He was, his last job with the army was at the Pentagon. And my mom was a stay at home mom.

McCulla: And where did you grow up?

Ammendolia: Yeah, so, being a, a military brat, as they say, I, I lived all over the place. You know, born in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And then we moved to Vicenza, Italy. Lived in a couple different places in Kentucky. And Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Fort Lee, Virginia. And then, spent the, I guess middle school and high school up in northern Virginia in Springfield.

01:26 McCulla: And, in what sense do you feel like moving around shaped your interests? Perhaps in school?

Ammendolia: Oh, and I forgot. Then I came down to Richmond to go to VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University], and I've been here ever since. What was that last question?

McCulla: Well, just about the impact of growing up in a lot of different places.

Ammendolia: That's a hard one. [Chuckles] The impact of growing up in a lot of different places? As far as it, as beer goes?

McCulla: Well, just maybe in terms of your academic interests. Or even what you ate and drank as a kid?

Ammendolia: Okay. Yeah, so I was definitely exposed to a lot of different food. And, my first career choice that I picked when I was ten years old was to be a chef. And I kind of worked towards that direction for a while until my dad convinced me that I was gonna be working every weekend and holiday when everybody else was having fun. And, somehow talked me out of, of following that, that path. But, yeah, so, I guess I have always been kind of a foodie. And that's actually the approach I took with beer when I first started brewing. I didn't get into the science of it, even though there's a whole lot of science you can get into. I was more into, you know, experimenting with the flavors, just from kind of a, a gut feeling. Even though I never really was into adding a lot of different non-traditional beer ingredients. I was more interested in learning how the traditional beer ingredients interacted with each other.

03:00 McCulla: And so, at what point was it that you got into beer?

Ammendolia: It was 1993. And, I was living in Jackson Ward, which is a neighborhood in Richmond. And my roommate and I discovered that there was a homebrewing shop that had opened in the Fan. I think it was called James River Homebrewing, or something like that. And we went in on the equipment and the ingredients. And just instantly fell in love with the hobby. And within a couple months had brewed, I think it was seven batches of beer. And we decided to, you know, come up with names and labels and descriptions and have all of our friends over for a party. And, yeah, pretty much just went from there. I never stopped brewing after that.

03:44 McCulla: You mentioned that you approach beer from a kind of flavor perspective, like a foodie perspective, as you said. Were there particular beers that interested you, in drinking and brewing beer at the beginning? Or experiences drinking beer?

Ammendolia: Yeah. Early on, I was more into the darker beers. Anywhere from brown ales to porters and stouts. Those, that type of flavor profile appealed to me more. I didn't really like a lot of the hoppier beers back then. It took me many years of brewing. And also trying to, trying my hardest to brew an IPA that my IPA-loving friends would like. And then, you know, drinking, sampling, my beers. And then somehow I sort of came over to the hop, hoppy side.

04:29 McCulla: When you started homebrewing, what was the beer scene like at the time in Richmond and beyond, that you recall?

Ammendolia: Back then it was very unusual to run into somebody else that was brewing. So, we didn't have like a lot of friends. And we didn't know about the James River Homebrewing Club, which did exist. But, we just weren't connected

with them. It was before the internet was really popular. And so, we had Charlie Papazian's book. And that was pretty much our only thing to go on versus, I mean, that coupled with our, our own trials and, trials and error, you know? Yeah, I, if I had started brewing, you know, in the early 2000s or something, I think I would've gotten a lot better at brewing in a much shorter time, 'cause there was the internet, YouTube, and all kinds of things to teach you, you know, better ways to go about making beer.

05:23 McCulla: And so, what, how did your friends respond at this party you mentioned where you introduced them to your homebrew?

Ammendolia: Yeah, they, they enjoyed the beers. I mean, some of them were better than others. Well, all of them if I tried them today might not be up to my current standards. But, but back then, we all thought they were, were pretty good. They were probably, some of them were upset because we, we made them go through from like the lighter tasting ones to the heavier ones and, they just wanted to skip to the, the big imperial stout or something like that. But yeah, they were well received.

05:55 McCulla: And, and so, what were your steps after that to, toward opening a homebrew shop?

Ammendolia: So, after that, I, I got into a completely different, you know, thing. I was managing a natural food store. So, here in Richmond, we have Ellwood Thompson's, which is a, you know, it started, started here. And, I went, I was there for eleven years. And I worked in the kitchen at first, cooking. And worked my way up 'til I was the kitchen manager. And by the time I left, I was the director of operations. And I'd kinda gone as far as I was gonna be able to go with that. And so, I thought that I would try to move on to something that I might be able to grow even more with. So, I, I went to work for Whole Foods. And did a training program up in northern Virginia, the whole DC area, and trained a bunch of different stores in like a management training program they had. And then I had to apply for the position here in Richmond when they opened the, the store out at Short Pump. And I got that. And so, I was in the opening management team here. And for a total of four years, I was with Whole Foods. And probably for ten years, I had been kind of toying with this idea of opening my own business, and I wasn't sure exactly what it was gonna be, but the homebrew shop kept coming up. And, yeah, so I, I didn't, I, I had my hesitation about going to work for Whole Foods, because it is a bigger company and I had always worked at kinda more independent businesses. And after four years, I, I realized that, yeah, I really needed to do my own thing. And, so I have a lot of really great retail experience and, and I opened my own shop in 2011 in the north side of Richmond. And, yeah, it did really well from the get-go, so.

07:53 McCulla: A lot of, well, some homebrewers decide if they want to open their own business, they open a brewery. So, what, why a homebrew shop?

Ammendolia: Yeah, so I was playing on my, my strengths in retail and also it's a lot easier, a lot cheaper to open a homebrew shop. So, I think my original order of supplies was, like, fifteen thousand dollars. You know? Which you could, one piece of equipment's gonna cost you more than that when you open a brewery. So, it was really that. I didn't wanna, I didn't wanna take on too much debt. So, it was something I could do on my own. And, and I was the only employee for the first three years as well, so, it was, it, it suited me.

McCulla: And so.

Ammendolia: I wanted to open a brewery, but also, that was before Virginia passed SB604, and so, you would've had to have opened a restaurant and a brewery, or a very large brewery that could support itself through distribution where you make a lot smaller margins. So, then, that's why I went ahead and opened a brewery. A few years later when, once the laws changed and you could have a tasting room and sell directly to your customers, I, I realized at that point that I could go more for almost, almost like a coffee shop model. Like, just very small and neighborhood-focused.

09:16 McCulla: So, in terms of the homebrew shop, could you talk a bit about the Richmond homebrewing community, how it's changed over time?

Ammendolia: So, when I first opened the shop, that was during a time that was kind of booming. You know, craft beer was, was, people were really excited about it and more and more people were interested in making their own beer. And then, in the few years after, so, Richmond went from having two craft breweries, which was Extra Billy's and Legend, to having thirty in just a few years. So, I think the motivation for people to brew their own beer, because they were looking to make something that they couldn't just go to the store and get, dropped a little bit when they, you know, there's thirty breweries to choose from and you can probably just walk down the street to your local brewery, and you don't have to brew, brew it yourself.

10:15 McCulla: And so, what, how would you define the motivation to homebrew, even if there are great breweries around you?

Ammendolia: Yeah, so, for me it was never about, about whether or not I could buy this beer. For me, it was the challenge of making beer at home that was as good as what I can buy. So, whether that was in the early days when I was trying to basically mimic the English ales that I liked at the time, or later as I discovered hoppy beers, you know, and, a lot of people used to think that you just throw a bunch of hops into a beer and it's an IPA. Especially people that don't like them think that you just, you know, throw pounds of, of hops in there, and make it super bitter, and then there you go. So, I started discovering some IPAs that had

just more nuanced flavors and subtleties. They were coaxing flavors out of hops that I had just, I wanted to learn how to do that myself.

11:14 McCulla: Do you recall what, which beers these were, by chance?

Ammendolia: So, early on, I would say, like, Dogfish Head 60 Minutes was pretty good. Like, it, it had some bitterness, but it also had, like, nice citrusy flavors that I liked a lot. We used to be able to get Three Floyds here, and so Three Floyds Alpha King was another one where, you know, it was like, wow, I'm tasting grapefruit. Or, you know, some other citrus fruit, a lot of times. And then some of the more west coast ones with piney flavors and things like that. So, I was at first making these beers, and my, my IPAs were turning out really a kind of astringent and not at all, to me, not at all pleasant. And, so, yeah. Just had to play with different techniques to figure out how to get the more subtle kind of flavors. I guess they're not really subtle flavors, but they seemed hard to get at first. [Chuckles]

12:11 McCulla: And so, when customers come into your shop now, well, first of all, could you describe a bit just the range of products that you offer?

Ammendolia: So, we, we sell everything to get yourself making beer, wine, cider, kombucha. Roasting your own coffee. And, but we really focus a lot on the beer stuff here, 'cause that's our passion. And we have, you know, I usually recommend to people to get started with extract kits. So, you know, you can come in and buy, like, an equipment kit that's got everything you need to get started. And a box that has all the ingredients you need for your first recipe. And I usually recommend to people that they don't really stray too far from the recipe at first. Just try to stick to it. Don't add any spices from your kitchen or anything like that. And just try to make a solid beer as the recipe was intended. And once you get the hang of that, and you, you know, you, you've got your sanitation process down, and you're not making, you know, beers that are sour and things like that, unless that's what you were intended to do, then you can start playing around. And then, yeah, so, if you, once you get those down, we've got all the raw ingredients, so you can start formulating your own recipes. Still using extract and specialty grains. And then you can move all the way on to all-grain brewing. And even if you, you're really serious, we sell grain mills so you can buy out a whole bag of, of uncrushed malt and crush it yourself at home and save a little bit of money that way.

13:45 McCulla: And, when people come into your shop, do you find, are they particularly interested in brewing specific styles? Or using particular ingredients?

Ammendolia: Yeah, so, a lot of times the beers that people are homebrewing do follow the trends of the beers that people are drinking. So, you do find a lot of people nowadays making hazy, juicy IPAs. But, you also have people that are coming in, you know, maybe they, maybe they moved here from England and

they weren't able to get, they aren't able to get some of the beers here that they could get back home. So, they might take up homebrewing so that they can make a nice English ale. Yeah, but, it, it runs the gamut. And, as our, we have a brewery here, too. And, and in our brewery we try to offer a range of beers. And some of them are classic styles. So, you know, I find that a lot of beer drinkers now are, are somewhat bored by classic styles. So, we also offer hazy IPAs and a Gose and different styles that are popular now. And, and I like those just as much, but I got into beer because I actually like beer that tastes like beer. And so, I don't wanna move to far away from that.

15:03 McCulla: And so, can you talk a bit about the leap into opening a brewery, which is attached to your homebrew shop?

Ammendolia: So, let's see. I guess it was 2015, we moved, I think we actually moved at the end of 2014. But, it took us a few months to get the brewery up and running. We decided that, you know, since you, that the laws in, in Virginia had changed, that you could have a tasting room and sell directly to your customers, that we could open a very small brewery. And so, I started writing a business plan for a one-barrel brewery, and, you know, thought about this kind of coffee shop sort of model where, you know, it was sort of more neighborhood-based. We weren't gonna be trying to do distribution. We were just gonna be able to showcase our beers here. And also, doing everything just like homebrewers do. So, our equipment, even though it's larger than what you would have at home, it's the same type of equipment that you can get for your home brewery. And, even the kegs that we keg in are Cornelius kegs, which were originally used by Coke and Pepsi, but homebrewers love them because they're five gallons, which is the typical homebrew batch size. So, we could show off, you know, that you can do this at home and, and, except we're doing it in a semi-professional way. I think I got off on a tangent.

16:33 McCulla: No. No. That's perfect. And so, what kinds of styles do you have on tap now?

Ammendolia: So, we try to have something on tap at all times that will, if you were to come in with a group of friends, everybody hopefully will find at least one beer that kinda suits them. So, anything from a blonde ale to Belgian Saison to an amber ale. And then we do a lot of, a lot of IPAs because, you know, we like them and that's what sells the best as well. So, we have a lot of IPAs. We do a foreign extra stout that we always have on called Irish Goodbye. And then, we do a lot of seasonal beers, too. Because, you know, people come in and, and they, they get bored with the same old beers. So, we have, we usually have about anywhere from twelve to sixteen beers on tap. And about half of those will be ones that you can get regularly, and the other half will be new, new recipes.

17:33 McCulla: We talked about this a bit earlier, but to what extent do you feel there's a, an overlap or interaction between the shop and the brewery?

Ammendolia: The homebrewing customers definitely like to come to the tasting room and try beers that we have. And occasionally you'll have people that come into the brewery and, you know, and are curious and decide they're gonna try their hand at brewing. But, not nearly as much as I had originally thought. So, when we got the opportunity to move the, the homebrew shop right next door, we took that so that we could expand our tasting room. And we, it allows us to spend better quality time with our homebrewing customers because we're not distracted by the noise and everything that's going on, you know, at a bar.

18:21 McCulla: And do you feel like there, to what extent is there interaction between the winemaking customers and the brewing customers, or those who are interested in coffee, or?

Ammendolia: The winemaking customers are kinda their own thing. Although, they will stop and have a beer or two. But, generally they're, they're, they're pretty wine-focused and, and don't really ask too much about making beer. There are a few customers we have that do both. But, yeah, very few.

18:52 McCulla: I'm curious about the extent to which, if you could describe homebrewers' role within larger American brewing culture, craft beer. What role do you think homebrewers play now?

Ammendolia: A lot of homebrewers are now brewing in commercial breweries. So, I would say what the craft beer scene kind of looked like, I don't know, ten or fifteen years ago versus what it looks like now, the current state, it looks more like what you would see in homebrewing, including, like, the names people come up with for their beers. The, all the different adjunct ingredients that are being put into beers. Like, homebrewers are always doing that, because they could, right? So, like, you're gonna make your own beer, and you feel like you wanna throw some raspberries into it, or, you know, chocolate or, whatever. You might not be able to find those, those beers commercially available. Or, you couldn't back then. Nowadays, that's what commercial breweries are doing. So, it, it actually has come around to where I'd say that commercial breweries are, are a lot like what homebrewing has been like for a, twenty years.

20:05 McCulla: And in terms of the consumer side of things, what people want to drink now, how do you see that having evolved over time?

Ammendolia: Yeah, once again, the adjuncts, like, that's become so much more popular, you know, whether it's coffee and coconut stout or, you know, the, the fruited Goses and Berliner Weisses that are probably more fruit than beer. That, that's really something that you didn't used to see nearly as much. I actually remember, it was probably, like, 1994, and one of the little shops in the Fan had a Redhook beer made with Starbucks coffee. And that was, like, wow. Coffee beer.

Like, you just didn't find coffee beers. So, that was, that was something special. And now, you know, coffee beers are everywhere. [Chuckles]

21:02 McCulla: Do you think that speaks to consumers being increasingly savvy or creative? Or is it a kind of impatience that, you know, for novelty?

Ammendolia: I don't even really know. I mean, I think some of it speaks to, like, the age of a lot of craft beer drinkers, which are a lot younger. So, like, the older craft beer drinkers, they'll, you know, they'll try those beers but generally, are still looking for beer beers. [Chuckles] I think, yeah, I think the younger, younger drinkers, it's like, maybe they didn't even think they liked beer, 'cause all they had ever had before was Bud Light or whatever. And then they try something that, you know, tastes more familiar because it has chocolate in it or something like that, you know? And then, they find they like that.

21:58 McCulla: And, do you find that leads them to other styles that you might describe more as beer beers? Or, what, you know, what, what is the kind of trajectory of a younger?

Ammendolia: That's kinda yet to be seen. So, you know, there's like a, a growth with, like, classic lagers, like, pilsners and things like that. But, I feel like usually the people I know that are into those are the actual brewers. So, like, you know, they drink IPAs all the time and their palate just wants a break. And so, they go for something like a pilsner. But I, you know, and we sell, we sell beers like that here too, but, still, by far our IPAs outsell everything else. But, anytime we put anything with any kind of flavor in it that, you know, someone walks in, that's the first thing they're gonna order if we have say, like, it could be just about any, any beer if it has, like, fruit added to it or something. People gravitate towards it. And I'm not a big fruit beer drinker myself. But we do it 'cause people like it.

22:59 McCulla: And so, what, are there particular styles that you find most satisfying to brew? You mentioned working on IPAs for a long time.

Ammendolia: Yeah. I'm still there, but I also like the challenge of brewing more subtle styles. So, like a pilsner or something like that, you know. There's, there isn't as much to hide behind. Like, so, you know, if you make, make a really hoppy beer, like, the hops can cover up some things. And if you make a really dark stout, like, the roasted flavors can cover up some flaws. But if you are making a light lager, there's not much to hide behind. So, I love that challenge. I had never made a session IPA before until, I guess it's been probably about a year now. So, the challenge of making a beer that's only four and a half percent alcohol and having it still, you know, hold its own, as an IPA. I really enjoyed that. And so, yeah, we do, we got the, the silver medal for the Virginia Craft Brewers Cup for our session IPA.

McCulla: Congratulations.

Ammendolia: [Chuckles] Thanks.

24:09 McCulla: I wanted also to ask about competition culture in the homebrew world. What role does, do competitions play in, you know, for homebrewers who are learning how to brew?

Ammendolia: So, a lot of homebrewers will use competitions as a way to get anonymous feedback on their beers. Like, or some people who are just serious brewers and they wanna win all the awards. But, a lot of brewers that are newer will enter their beer into a competition just because, you know, you give it to your friends and your friends all tell you how great it is, and that you need to open a brewery. But, you give it to someone who doesn't know whose, who made this beer, and they, you know, they give you the actual feedback that you're looking for. So, that's, that's one way. Or one thing that competitions do. I'm gonna go off on a tangent. [Chuckles] So, are you familiar with Untappd? So, with Untappd, you know, people, any, anybody can get the app, put it on their phone, and, and rate every beer that they try. Well, from a brewer's perspective, it's, it's so foreign to do it the way that, that people do it on Untappd because when, if you, like, if you've done any kind of BJCP, beer judge certification program, training or, you know, judged in any kind of competition that's sanctioned by the BJCP, you judge a beer as how, you know, how good of an example of the style is this beer? Not, I don't like IPAs, half a star. [Chuckles] And so, you know, that's the, that's an interesting thing for everybody I know that makes beer. A lot of brewers are putting their beer out there and they, they see Untappd reviews and, you know, anybody can do whatever they want with Untappd. And, so, you just have to come to terms with that. You're putting your beers out there for people.

26:02 McCulla: Well, and what, so, when it comes to something like Untappd or Instagram, it seems like social media is an increasingly loud voice in the taproom. Do you see that, how do you see that kind of taking shape going into the future?

Ammendolia: I don't know if I, I can answer that one. I mean, I think it's, it's not gonna go away. But I don't know how it's gonna really change. Hopefully people will get to where they like beer because of what it tastes like more than what it looks like, though. [Chuckles]

26:37 McCulla: A couple more questions about the brewing process here. For brewing here, for you, and then also for your homebrewing customers, what do you feel is, are particularly challenging things to learn about brewing process?

Ammendolia: Really, like, I would say that it's not, it's not challenging. Like a lot of people need to just get over their fear if they wanna do it and just try doing it. As, as Charlie Papazian said, "Relax. Don't worry. Have a homebrew." But, you know, when you start brewing a lot of times, what you'll hear from people is, you know, sanitation, sanitation, sanitation. That's very true. But it's also easy, you

know. I mean, it's not the most fun or glamorous part of brewing, but it, as long as your stuff is clean and sanitized, and you, you know, you pitch the right amount of yeast, you keep it, you know, from getting really out of control temperature, you know, like, too warm or, or too cold, you're gonna make a drinkable beer. So, I guess I'd stick with, it's not really that challenging. There's a few basic things. If you get those right, you're gonna make a decent beer.

27:46 McCulla: And you brew at a very small capacity here. What does that enable you to do as a brewer?

Ammendolia: So, theoretically that enables us to, to be very experimental and try lots of different things. Because we're only making two barrels at a time, which is about sixty-two gallons of beer at a time. But, we don't really take advantage of that as well as we could. Because we do have some flagship beers, probably more than we should have. But, people are, are demanding. They come in and they're like, "Where's Venus Rising?" That's our flagship double IPA. And so, we feel like we can't run out of that beer. And then we do, we spend a lot of time experimenting with different IPAs because there's a lot of hop combinations and unusual new hops to try. But, yeah, I mean, I'd say we're not taking advantage of the fact that we're as, as small as we are as well as we could.

28:44 McCulla: If you have a, a busy taproom, like you said, people like what you brew.

Ammendolia: Yeah.

McCulla: So.

Ammendolia: That's true. Yeah. We were, probably about six months ago, we got to the point where we were running out of beer. And we were getting down to maybe, like, four beers on tap. Where we usually have, you know, twelve or sixteen. We've had up to twenty beers on tap before. And we increased our, not our capacity to produce beer, but, well, let me backtrack. We, we got more fermenters, so we have to brew more often on our small system. But we can, we can make about fifty percent more beer. So, we have, we've gotten to the point now where we're caught up. The walk-in's full. And we can get more experimental.

29:28 McCulla: Do you have, going forward, thinking about possible future growth, are you, do you have a strategy for that? Or are you kind of content with the way your businesses are currently situated?

Ammendolia: Yeah, at this point I, I, I like the small format, and I wanna keep that. I have thought about possibly, you know, another location or something like that, but, not looking to get, you know, not a ten-barrel system in here or something like that. Possibly up to a five-barrel system. So, we would just do some things to, to streamline our brewery and make it easier to use. Like, maybe

get the floors re-done. And we have floor drains, but we don't have the good floor drains that the water just flows straight down the drain. So, yeah, some, some fine-tuning and maybe get a little bit bigger system and upgrade some of our fermenters. But, stick to around, you know, still a nano-brewery at like maybe a five-barrel production capacity.

McCulla: As I travel, I meet brewers and other business owners who are operating at all different scales. And, you know, certainly the size of a business is very much on people's minds in the current craft economy. And so, I wonder, you know, what do you see going forward in terms of craft beer?

Ammendolia: Well, and so part of the reason that I wanna stay small is because I think there is gonna be some kind of a shake out, whatever you'd call it. Bubble burst or something like that. And I think that we're, we'll be protected from that being, you know, a brewery that really could survive even if really just the neighborhood was supporting us. So, yeah, I do think that there, we'll see some more breweries closing. I think you're gonna see probably the, the ones that have, you know, a better focus on quality are probably gonna survive. And then, you know, some people are just really good businesspeople and can figure out how to make it work, too. But, I think beer quality, like, 'cause breweries have opened so quickly in such a short time that, you know, they're not all really great. So, yeah. I think you'll see some of those shake out. [Chuckles]

31:43 McCulla: The, you're focused on the very local community. What role do you see your taproom playing in the community? How does the community use this kind of space?

Ammendolia: Yeah, it's a, it's a social thing. I mean, I guess you could maybe compare it to like English pubs, you know? It's a little different. It's definitely more American-style. And we have a mix, 'cause we have got, we've got a lot of regular customers, but then we do see people coming in from out of town. But as far as our, our role in the community here, it's definitely a social gathering place. We do, every Thursday and Sunday we have a running club. And we'll get, you know, fifty runners out and they'll run a three-mile course through the neighborhood and meet back up here for beers afterwards. And actually, we've added a five-mile course as well. Some people are running five miles. Some people are running three. And there are, there's a walking group that's sort of an offshoot, a walking group, from that, too. And, yeah, I mean, so, we're packed in here on a Thursday night, which used to be not a slow night, but it was mediocre. And now, like, we'll fill the place up because it, and then it is very social.

33:01 McCulla: What is, in terms of the community of Richmond breweries, what is the relationship like, among brewers in the city?

Ammendolia: I think, in general, like, here it's like I think it is everywhere else. It's just a very friendly, supportive community. You know, if people are running

low on ingredients, you know, certain ingredients, they'll call up another brewery and see if they can borrow, borrow it or buy from them. Like, excuse me. [Coughs] I recently had trouble sourcing Galaxy hops and so I was able to call a couple other breweries in town and buy some from them, which was very nice. And other breweries have been, you know, running out of Crawlors, the can growlers. We do that here. And we were able to loan them some until they got their delivery. I'm gonna get some water.

McCulla: Okay.

Ammendolia: I don't know what else to say about that. But yes, it's supportive and friendly for the most part.

34:06 McCulla: Okay. And then, just about Richmond in general, the economy, the politics, what do you see coming in the future for the city, especially with relation to breweries?

Ammendolia: So, you know, Richmond has really grown and changed quite a bit. Especially, I'd say in the last fifteen years. When I first moved here, it was 1989, and people described it as dirty and rundown and, and now it's very vibrant. There are lots, lots and lots of independent businesses. So, I, it's, breweries have come up quite a bit, but it's been also along with restaurants and small shops, like, clothing shops and things that are, are independently operated here in Richmond. And, I mean, I, I just see it's continuing in that direction.

35:01 McCulla: Alright, I have a, a few kind of wrap-up questions. You know, the focus of a lot of my travel and research is this craft beer industry and the term "craft" is sometimes understood differently by other people. Do you like the term craft? Do you feel like it is the best use, the best term to describe what you and others of your business model do?

Ammendolia: I, so, when I started drinking what you would call craft beer now, we called it microbrews, or imports. And I remember when it was like a conscious decision that it was gonna be, the name was changed to craft beer. And I liked it at first. But just because you open a small brewery and you're making beers that, you know, might be trendy or whatever, doesn't mean you're good at it. And if you're not good at it, is it, is it a craft? I don't, I, I'm not sure. So, I don't, I don't know that it's an accurate term. But, it's the term we have. So, I'm, I'm good with it I guess. [Chuckles]

36:05 McCulla: There's also discussion about expanding the reach of craft beer to a more diverse group of consumers and producers. How do you think that that producers and consumers can work to make craft a more diverse industry?

Ammendolia: I don't, I don't have the answer for that. I mean, I would love to see that happen as well. But, I don't know. Like, we had our anniversary party last

year, and one of my friends showed up and, and took note that it was mostly, you know, a certain demographic. And, it was, he was looking to me to change that. And I'm like, "I don't know how to change that." I mean, everybody's welcome and this is all about the love of beer. So, if you love beer, we're here to celebrate that, you know? But, I don't know how to actively go about changing it.

37:05

McCulla: Alright, so, one last question. You've been involved in the food industry and now the brewing industry for a while now. What would you say you value most about what you do?

Ammendolia: The pride of making a product that I stand behind. I like making people happy with, you know, they try something I've made and they think it's maybe, some, some might even say the best beer they ever had. [Laughs] That, this makes me feel good. Excuse me. Makes me feel good. Yeah. I think when I was still working at Whole Foods and I was thinking about what my next move was gonna be, at one point, you know, at Whole Foods you get to try a lot of products and you get to meet a lot of the producers and I was trying, I think it was, it was some goat cheese that someone made, and I thought it was just a really delicious product. And these people raise their goats, and made the cheese, and went out and sold it. And I was like, "Maybe I should do that." So, I guess it's just a, a, you know, a pride of, of producing something that other people enjoy.

McCulla: Well said. Well, thank you very much for your time. It's been great to talk.

Ammendolia: Thank you so much. It's been great.