

Names of Interviewees: Emily Bruno, Jeff Ramirez, Julie Verratti
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Name of Interviewer: Theresa McCulla
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Theresa McCulla: It's July 16, 2019. This is Theresa McCulla of the National Museum of American History. I am with John Harry and we are interviewing Julie Verratti, Chief Brand Officer and Founder of Denizens Brewing Company, Emily Bruno, Chief Administrative Officer and Founder, and Jeff Ramirez, Chief Beer Officer and Founder. We are meeting at the in Riverdale Park, Maryland. 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. Um, so, Julie, let's start with you. Uh, where and when were you born?

Julie Verratti: Uh, I was born August 17, 1979, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

TM: And what were your parents' names?

JV: Uh, Carol McHugh Verratti and Thomas George Verratti.

TM: And what did they do?

JV: Uh, my father is a private practice clinical social worker. Also kind of a man of all trades. He has a couple other side businesses that he does. Um, and my mother is an attorney and worked for the federal government for over forty years and just retired.

TM: And did you grow up in Silver Spring?

JV: I did grow up in Silver Spring. Spent most of my time there, um, in high school. And moved a little bit around the area. And then eventually made my way up to Massachusetts for undergrad. So.

TM: Um, what do you recall about the neighborhood where you grew up?

JV: Uh, it was, I don't know if you watch *Stranger Things*, which is a kind of a phenom right now in the culture. Uh, a lot like that in terms of, you know, kids on bikes running around. Really had a lot of sense of freedom where you could kind of go off and get into trouble, as long as you get home by, you know, dark. Uh, a lot of, just a great neighborhood to grow up in.

00:01:34 TM: And, what do you recall about, uh, eating and drinking growing up?

JV: Um, it, it's funny, my, my mother didn't drink. Um, my father definitely drank some. Um, in terms of eating, you know, my mother worked full-time. My father worked full-time. Uh, I have a lot of memories growing up, that house where I

was making my own food. So, I had a lot of [chuckles] mac and cheese and those type of thing, things that seven and eight year old kids kind of cobble together when they're at home.

00:02:01 TM: Do you recall, uh, to what extent was beer part of the social life of your [unintelligible]?

JV: Um, it wasn't really. Um, I don't really have a lot of memories of it being a thing. I mean, as I've gotten older and as an adult, I definitely kind of bonded with my dad a little bit more when it comes to enjoying beer. And other types of spirits as well.

00:02:19 TM: And, uh, in school, what subjects were you drawn to?

JV: Um, I was drawn to a lot of different things. Um, you know, I, when I was in undergrad I actually triple majored and minored. So, I minored in economics. I majored in politics, history and philosophy. Uh, I ended, ended up going to law school. So, I also have a law degree.

TM: And so, politics, history and philosophy. I'm, I'm wondering what drew you to those?

JV: Um, I think that I really, so I, I'm actually the type of person that kind of likes rules. Um, so it's one of the things I like about history is there sort of is, there, there are facts that exist. And you kind of, a lot of it's sort of memorization. I enjoy things like that. I really like crossword puzzles for that reason. It sort of makes you think, but also there's specific answers. Um, politics, it's still sort of the same thing. There'd be sort of rules of the game, but it's also figuring out how to work them to your advantage. Um, messaging, communication, all of that. And then, um, law obviously is the same sort of thing. Which is why I was sort of drawn to that. And philosophy was kind of an accidental major because some of the classes are cross [chuckles] checked both boxes.

00:03:25 TM: When you studied law, uh, did you specialize in a particular area?

JV: Um, I, well, in law school, you know, you, you don't really have specialty areas unless you go and get like an LLM later. But, uh, I took most of my electives were focused on tax law, political law, uh, and stuff that impacted small business.

TM: And, uh, one more question about your, your educational, um, background. The, the small business proclivity. Did that come from, um, your early history? Or?

JV: Um, I think that I've always kind of had a, a, a deep respect for entrepreneurs and business in general. When I was a kid, um, my cousin Becky always tells me

that, you know, they would ask me, you know, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I was like five or six. And my response was, "I'm gonna be a CEO of a really large company." Which is kind of a weird thing for a five year old to say. [Laughs] Um, I'm not that now. Uh, but still obviously very active in business. Um, yeah, I just, I, I really like entrepreneurship. And in fact after law school, prior to opening Denizens I, uh, worked as a senior advisor for the Small Business Administration. I was, uh, part of the presidential management fellowship program.

00:04:34 TM: And we'll, we'll move for these early questions to Emily. Um, Emily, when and where were you born?

Emily Bruno: I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1982.

TM: And did you grow up in Trenton?

EB: No. I grew up in, um, part of my time in Pennsylvania and part in, uh, just outside of Chicago. When I was really young. And then back in Pennsylvania. My dad was a physician. So, he, um, had to do some schooling and stuff and we moved around. But I grew up just outside of Philadelphia in my early years.

TM: And so, you mentioned your dad was a physician. What did your mom do?

EB: My mom was a teacher in special education. And she also took care of us as we got older.

TM: And what do you recall about the neighborhood where you grew up?

EB: Um, it was, so, where I spent most of my childhood was in Allentown, Pennsylvania. And it was definitely, like, I grew up next to a cornfield. So, we were definitely outside a lot running around. It was pretty rural. It's suburban.

00:05:30 TM: And do you have memories of what you ate and drank as a child?

EB: Yes. I grew up in an Italian American Family. So, that was a big part of growing up, was eating Italian American cuisine. Um, and then, um, my mom, bless her heart, because I can't imagine how she would do it, how I would do this, but made, really made homecooked meals every day. Um, so, we had a lot of really good food growing up.

TM: What kinds of dishes? Can I ask?

EB: All kinds of stuff. So, she, um, you know, we grew up in, I was in kind of Pennsylvania Dutch country. So, sometimes there'd be, like, pierogies. But then homemade meatballs. I mean, it really kind of ranged. Yeah.

TM: And, uh, and then what, what did you study in school? What subjects were you drawn to?

EB: When I was younger, math. But then I kind of outgrew that unfortunately as I got into high school. So, then I was politically active. Very politically active in college. And so, international relations and politics and government.

00:06:27 TM: And then, uh, Jeff, um, where and when were you born?

Jeff Ramirez: I was born in Summit, New Jersey.

TM: Okay. In, uh, what year?

JR: 1986.

TM: And, uh, what were your parent's names and what did they do?

JR: Sheila Ramirez. Maiden name McLaughlin. And then, uh, [unknown], Frank Ramirez. [Laughs]

TM: And what did they do?

JR: Um, my father is a lawyer. And my mother is a director of admissions of a private school.

TM: And what was it like growing up in the neighborhood where you did?

JR: Uh, like, very congested. The most congested part of, like, the most congested state. Or, area I should say. Um, but it was, I mean, it was very. Played a lot of sports. I don't know. [Chuckles]

00:07:17 TM: And then in school, um, what subjects were you drawn to?

JR: Uh, like Emily, uh, math early on. I think because someone told me at some point I was good at it. But, kind of not really. [Laughs]

TM: Okay.

JR: Uh, but later on, uh, art classes were one of the, at least in high school, uh, I spent most of my time like at the art area. Um, then in college did anthropology as a major. Um, but by the, my senior year, finished that early and did art classes.

00:07:51 TM: Um, and, and what appealed to you about art in particular would you say?

JR: Creation. Making stuff. Um. I wasn't really into painting, but I like sculpture. But that was always my downfall [unintelligible].

TM: [Laughs] Alright.

JR: [Unintelligible] the sculpture.

[Laughter]

TM: Um, so, I'd love if, and, you know, from this point onward please feel free to answer, um, in whatever order you'd like.

JR: Sorry if I cut off your questions.

00:08:15 TM: No. No, you did not at all. No. Um, but I'd, I'd love to hear about all of your paths to beer. Um, it sounds like none of you really began in beer necessarily. Um, and so, did you have early taste memories related to beer? Or, um, experiences enjoying beer?

JV: Um, I got in trouble drinking it a little bit in high school. Um, but, other than that, uh, those were like my earliest. Um, you know, and my, my dad when I was a kid, you know, we were, I have a twin sister. And so when we were small, like, under the age of ten, he would, you know, give us a sip of his beer or something. You know. Nothing, it's not like he was giving us our own beer. But, you know what I mean. Um, I didn't actually drink in undergrad. And I, I, um, I picked up, uh, craft, had my first craft beer when I was in law school actually. Um, and really, really enjoyed it. And that's where.

TM: What was that beer? May I ask?

JV: It was a, um, I don't even actually, might not even be considered craft. It was a Scottish Ale by, um, it starts with a "M." I'm picturing the bottle right now, but I forget the name of the brewery. Um, but it was my dad's favorite kind of beer. So, I tried it. Um, I thought it was good. And kind of fell into it and started homebrewing right away. Uh, and really, um, getting into more of the different craft varieties. Uh.

TM: And this was in Boston?

JV: This was actually in D.C. I was in the Boston area for undergrad. And then moved back down to D.C. for law school.

TM: And around what year was this?

JV: 2007. Yeah.

00:09:46 TM: And when you were getting into homebrewing, um, how did you procure, procure the equipment you needed and, um?

JV: Uh, there was actually a local homebrew shop. Well, I wouldn't say necessarily totally local. It was in, it's in Frederick, Maryland. It's called The Flying Barrel. And so, I would go up there and pick out recipes, read a lot of Charlie's books, um, which really inspired me. And, uh, that's basically how I got into it. Yeah.

00:10:14 EB: Uh, I went to school, undergrad and grad school, in Boston. And, uh, so, I was, you know, in the mid-2000s was drinking like Long Trail and Magic Hat and [unintelligible] which is, you know, it wasn't craft. But, that was craft as much as craft as we were getting then. Um, from those [unintelligible]. So, I drank a lot of craft beer in Boston. And that was sort of how I got started. Never thought about homebrewing because it seemed like way too much work for exactly what you could spend buying a professional's beer.

[Laughter]

EB: So, the math didn't really work out for me. But.

JV: So, you are good at math.

EB: Yeah.

[Laughter]

00:10:49 TM: Do you recall, were you, um, these particular beers, did they appeal to you from a flavor perspective? Or was it, um, the setting where you were drinking those beers?

EB: Uh, it was the flavor and sort of understanding that, you know. I had been in, also in high school and had a lot of macro, um, kind of lagers. And so, being exposed then to more flavorful beers. But I was just in crappy college bars in Boston. [Chuckles] There was no, nothing special about it, really.

00:11:19 TM: And, and Jeff, how about you?

JR: What's the question? [Laughs]

TM: Well, your initial, um, initial encounters with beer? Or what attracted you to beer?

JR: Young age. I think I had Dogfish Head when I was seventeen. Um, when I was in Ohio at college, uh, for some reason Kenyon College had a nice craft beer selection at their one market. And, I exploited that. [Chuckles] And, uh, yeah, no, a lot of import and early craft. And when I was a junior in college, um, was when I really realized I was not an academic. And didn't really know what I wanted to

do. But I like making things. So, I actually tried homebrewing then in college. Um, to see if I wanted to get into craft beer. Which I did.

TM: And what year, what, what years were you in college?

JR: 2008 I graduated.

TM: Okay.

JR: So four years before that.

00:12:14 TM: And how did you get your supplies? Or how did you learn how to brew?

JR: We had the internet. So, we looked. [Laughed] I ordered from like Northern Brewer, I believe. Um, actually [unintelligible] to start at my, my parent's home. And then in college I did all varieties. So, um, again, a lot of effort for what one was getting, as Emily pointed out. [Laughs] But, I enjoyed it. I wanted to make sure I enjoyed it to see before I wanted, like, try and get into it. But I could tell is that it was almost like the music industry back then of like just trying to get into it is very difficult. So.

00:12:51 TM: Sure. And so, for, for both you and Julie, when you started to homebrew, um, what styles did you begin with?

JV: I think I made a wheat ale. And whatever the adjunct was. Like, I got a, my sister gave me, like, a Mr. Beer Kit, was my first foray into it. Um, wasn't very good. Um, not because the ingredients were bad. It's because [chuckles] I didn't have the skills to make it taste good. Um, that was my first thing that I did with that.

JR: Uh, I would say the first ones were, ESB was definitely the first one. Then Hefeweizen. And then the Tripel. And then something [unintelligible]. That's like the first four I can remember.

TM: Okay.

JR: Uh.

00:13:38 TM: And so, how did the three of you meet? And, um, what role did beer play as your, um, relationships continued?

EB: Well [unintelligible].

[Laughter]

EB: Actually, because I think the first time I had, be, real, Julie and I are married. And so, the first time I think we really hung out was over your beer at our, your brother and my sister's wedding.

JR: Right.

EB: When you had made beer. So, um, beer did sort of bring us together. Um, so my sister is married to Jeff's brother. And so, the first, we had met, but very briefly. And the first time that we kind of hung out and talked about beer, Jeff had brought beer that he had made for the wedding. Um, so we kinda, I had enjoyed it and thought his beer was really good. And then we sort of just started talking from there. And at a family dinner at Christmas time, six months later maybe, maybe a year later.

JR: Yeah. Yeah.

EB: We managed.

JR: Yeah, it was a June wedding.

EB: Yeah. Um, where I was like, "Hey, do you, do you want to move back to the East Coast? Do you wanna open a brewery ever?"

00:14:36 TM: What were your jobs at the time?

EB: Um, Julie, like she said, was at the Small Business Administration. I was also at the Small Business Administration at the National Women's Business Council. So, an advisory council to the SBA. And, um, I was doing research on women's entrepreneurship. I knew that I wanted to open a business. And so, took that position to do research for, to kind of incubate ideas. Um, and Jeff was out in Colorado.

00:15:04 TM: Okay. Could you talk a bit about your, your path in brewing then?

JR: Uh, yeah. So, graduated from Kenyon. Uh, immediately served at Trap Rock Brewing Restaurant in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey. Uh, showed my, expressed my interest to the head brewer of apprenticing. So, about two months after graduating, it was the fall or three months, in September, and he was like, "Ah, slow down." He'd come in. So, I apprenticed there for about six to eight months. Um, then got a job as an assistant brewer at Iron Hook Brewery and Restaurant, but they were opening one in Maple Shade at the time. Um, [unintelligible] Maple Shade, New Jersey. Sorry. New Jersey. Uh, I worked there for a couple years. Moved out to Colorado. Uh. Got a job at Mountain Sun. They then built a production brewery in Denver. So, each brewery, they used to have, just like, one head brewer. Now they assign a head brewer to Mountain Sun, the original Boulder one, which is now not brewing. Southern Sun, which is South Boulder.

Um, and then Vine Street. So, I was the head brewer at the Mountain Sun, one in Boulder, the original. And built like a barrel-aging program down at the Vine Street Brewery to produce more [unintelligible].

00:16:21 TM: So, um, one of the topics that has become certainly an interest as I've been traveling around is the importance of region in American beer. I mean, you know, to some extent I feel like you can get any kind of product you want in two days online. But, but certainly that's not true with relation to beer. And so, I'm curious, when you moved out to Colorado, did you, to what extent did you feel a true difference? A true distinction in Colorado beer culture?

JR: Well, it was kind of a mix, actually, because when I moved out there, and it was only Colorado beer when I was there. I mean, they made impor-, bring in more regional stuff now. But, I remember distinctly I was living [unintelligible] Colorado and going to the liquor store. And I was like, who are these people? [Unintelligible] and all this. Anyway [unintelligible] and stuff like that. But, um, there were certain beers that maybe I was used to drinking when I lived in Philly and I was working in South Jersey, uh, that I couldn't get there. Um, so it was, I mean, it's, that's one of the great things about Colorado. Is that it very much supports the craft beer there. And the people do. The businesses do. Um, and no matter what, working in this industry and being a consumer, beer is best drank fresh.

00:17:26 TM: Did you notice a clear difference from a flavor perspective out there? Were the, would you say the, uh, hop?

JR: Yeah. They didn't like making lagers that much. So, it was just mostly hoppy and, uh, big malt, malty beers, which were great. Um, so [unintelligible] lagers that was, I thought, missing in availability in a craft level there, at the time. And this was 2011.

00:17:46 TM: 2011? Okay. And what was this beer that you brewed for the, the wedding that you, that you brought that Emily tasted?

JR: Did I brew a beer? No. I brought beer.

JV: You brought beer.

TM: Brought beer. Oh, you brought beer.

JV: Yeah. You just showed up with some kegs, I think.

JR: Well, that was from Iron Hill. So, I made a Quadrupel over there that was aged in bourbon barrels. I brought that.

JV: You brought a Quad?

JR: I know. It was a terrible idea.

[Chuckles]

JR: I also brought Iron Hill's Pale Ale. Their Iron Down. Uh, I brought a Saison from Mountain Sun that I had made that was like a kettle sour, a Saison, at the time. Um, and then a Joe's Pilsner from Avery.

TM: That's a, a good selection.

JR: Avery was nice enough to donate that keg. [Unintelligible]

00:18:37 TM: And Julie and Emily. How would you say over time, prior to opening the brewery, your palates developed with relation to beer?

JV: Um, like I said, well, I started with that first beer, Scottish Ale, you wouldn't catch me drinking that style of beer nowadays. My palate has definitely changed over the years. Um, I had a phase where I was really into, uh, Belgian style beers. At one point I was drinking a ton of ESB, which, again, you'll not catch me drinking that style anymore. Um, I'm not really a big fan of super malty beers or super hoppy beers. So, I like things to be very balanced. I tend, so I'm, you know, I like IPAs, but as long as they are, it's not just completely hop focused or way big in malt [unintelligible]. Um, much more of a balanced, um, type style that I like now. Um.

00:19:32 EB: Um, I don't think I'm, you know, I certainly learned a lot more about beer since opening Denizens than I did before. Um, technically. But, I've always liked sour beers and barrel-aged beers. Um, I still do, I like lagers a lot more than IPAs, than I did before. Um, I just, I like, I just like a beer that I can drink, like, a couple of. Um, IPAs are too much for me. [Unintelligible] I'm just getting older. But, yeah.

00:20:00 TM: Um, so, you've acknowledged the, the work, the labor involved in brewing beer places. So, what, what compelled you to want to get together to open a brewery?

JV: Um, I think for me, you know, working at the Small Business Administration, part of my job there was I traveled the country a lot and interacted with small business owners all over the country. Um, you know, I spent time in Wisconsin visiting places. I spent time in Texas and Florida, etcetera. And it's really hard to be interacting with small business owners every day and not feel inspired by that. Um, and so that, that was part of it, is feeling that inspiration, like, wanting to strike out on my own. Um, you know, when I was in undergrad, I did have some of my own businesses. Nothing at the scale of what this is. You know.

TM: What kinds of businesses?

JV: Um, I had my own, um, gourmet coffee catering company. And I would, like, work private parties. I had bought an espresso machine and would, you know, all of that. And then, um, I was actually a personal trainer at one point. Uh, which I built [unintelligible] business doing that. Um, and then, yeah, Denizens was really the next, [chuckles] next business that I was involved in from a founding perspective. But, I also, being born and raised in Silver Spring, um, you know, Emily and I had moved there, uh, and bought a house there in 2011, I think? Yeah, 2011. And it, we kind of noticed there was just, there wasn't something like a, a local craft brewery that existed there. Uh, and it, we saw this kind of, a gap, an opportunity. Something that, you know, we both really loved beer. Um, Emily was really excited about the business side of it. And, um, I, that excited me as well. But, I think probably excited Emily more than me. Um, I initially liked the idea of having something where we could have this big community place. And, uh, yeah, that's basically what kind of like pushed us towards it. Well, for me at least.

00:22:03 TM: Do you have other, um, reasons why you, why you also wanted to be part of a, a team opening a brewery?

JR: Are you speaking to me, or?

TM: Both of you.

[Laughter]

JR: Um, part of me trying to homebrew to see if I actually enjoyed making it was because I, at one point I was, I was just thinking that I wanted to own a brewery. Whatever that meant. 'Cause you're young, right? And my thought was, alright, it's a business. I can either go that route, which was not really necessarily the route I wanted to, um, pursue. However I understood that it was necessary. And the other route was, like, understanding how to manufacture it and all that. So, one is more lucrative than the other. I chose the less lucrative route. Um, and, you know, worked at a couple different breweries that, luckily for me, I learned different things from, whether it be have to visually see an operation that's tight and learn from different managers of, of why their numbers are, are tight, and just like yield all the stuff. You know, inventory, whatever. Raw materials. And then also creativity. And had a, uh, availability to a lot of different materials. So, I've had that experience over the years. And also being in different areas. Always trying to learn from somebody when you're in the area, uh, when you're around them. Whether it's a contractor brewer or business person. Um, and then these two ladies gave me an opportunity to grow together with them and build something where we all have different kind of fortes [unintelligible]. So.

00:23:44 EB: Yeah, I mean, I think, like, for me, um, I did wanna have a, my own business. I, I learned after some time in the D.C. area that I really wasn't good or interested in, like, a nine to five. Or being part of a large organization. Too, I'm like, too impatient for that. So, um, I like craft beer because it's, I'm, at least the model, business model that we've built, is a mix of many different things. So, it's never boring. Sometimes it's too exciting.

[Laughter]

EB: You do, I wanted to slow down a little bit. But, um, you know, we do have manufacturing obviously. There's wholesale business that we have. There's a retail business. Um, so there's the science and the art kind of coming together in how we can grow the business. So, um, it's interesting.

00:24:30 TM: Great. Um, could you talk a bit about the, the very early days when you were thinking of a business plan or what your strategy was for actually opening the doors to your brewery? Um, what were those days like?

JV: Uh, bananas.

EB: It was, yeah.

[Laughter]

EB: It was pretty scary. Um, after we had taken risk, you know. So, in the planning stage we were really thinking a lot about, well, we thought, you know, the, the craft beer scene in the Washington, D.C. area was very young then. I mean, and the couple, the handful of breweries that existed were, um, at least in the immediate metro D.C. area, were in warehouse spaces. There was no sort of taproom component. And then you had, like, the Gordon Biersch's or those kind of chain brewpubs. But there wasn't anything else in between. So, we really pulled on Jeff's experience in Philadelphia and Boulder and the taproom model and, and knowing that we lived in Silver Spring and we knew there was a need for another third space, bar, restaurant, um, environment there, because it was pretty, also pretty young in its development. Um, it kind of all came together and we really wanted to stick with what was a very unique model at the time, and still is kind of uni-, unique in the DMV, which is, um, we have a full [unintelligible], full service taproom, but we have full scale distribution. Especially now that we have this facility. So, that, that combination of the two business models is nobody, like, there's just a handful of other breweries that are doing that in the area. So, it offers us some stability because of the taprooms. They're also a lot to manage, so you have to really be sharp and know what you're doing on that side of the business, 'cause it can take you down really quick. So, as long as we can keep that stable, you know, like, it's, it's a very, it enables us to be, to really make the kind of beers that we want to make, um, for wholesale distribution.

TM: And, um, related to these comments, why do you think the, the.

EB: Sorry, that was not an answer to your question.

TM: No.

[Laughter]

TM: It was, really. Um.

[Laughter]

EB: Sorry about that. I can answer your actual question.

00:26:27 TM: Why do you think the craft scene and the taproom scene in D.C. is so young and so different from other places, uh, in the country?

JV: I think part of it is the, the legal framework. Um, uh, one of the things that we had to do when we were getting open, uh, was actually change what's, change some laws. So, did a lot of advocacy on the state level as well as the county level. Um, our original location is in Montgomery County, Maryland. This one that we're sitting in right now is in Prince George's County, Maryland. And in Montgomery County, it's the only complete controlled jurisdiction in the entire country. So, if you're a retail licensee, you buy your spirits, you buy your wine, and you buy your beer from the county. Uh, so, we got, uh, we had to get a carve-out created. It's in the law, uh, that allows small breweries to bypass, uh, you know, the department of liquor control, so that we can sell directly to retailers. So, that allowed for our self-distribution. Um, and then also helped to create a, uh, a rule change where we could open a taproom, do the full scale production distribution, and not have to operate a restaurant. Uh, we do operate restaurants in both locations. But if we wanted to shut it down, uh, at least the one in Silver Spring, we could at any point. Um, so that was a couple of things, and.

EB: So, that was partly what made it scary.

JV: Yeah.

EB: Was.

JV: And then getting.

EB: You know, we had.

JV: The governor's signature.

EB: Right.

JV: And the loan.

00:27:54 EB: Right. We. Right, we, we could get a lot of the issues that most businesses face. You can't get money. You know, even if, even though we had a pretty tight business plan. And we were able to raise some private equity pretty quickly. We, you know, getting a loan as a new business, it has to be guaranteed in some way. So, just jumping through all the hurdles of that and, and having a lot of that be contingent on the lobbying changed and having to, like, lobby the governor to sign a bill on the certain day so we could close our loans, we keep construction going. It was, it was a pretty stressful time. And that's what I, before, when I said before, we took risk. Because once you take some initial risk, like, once we had used our investors' money to start doing construction, there was no turning back because, even though the, the, the hurdles were pretty large, like, getting laws changed and, you know, that kind of stuff. And we had to keep going 'cause we had friends and family that had invested in our company. We needed to succeed for them.

00:28:50 TM: I, and especially in, in the legislative front, how did you, how did you begin that process?

JV: Just reached out to local officials and said, hey, this is what the law says right now. This is the business model we want to do. Here is some examples of states that have this type of framework. And look how successful this industry is. Look at the number of jobs that have been created. The re-, tax revenues. We should be like this. I mean, just to put it in summary, that's basically the messaging that we used. And, uh, we were able to get people to vote for it. Passed unanimously in Annapolis, in Maryland, and luckily the, the governor at the time, Governor O'Malley signed it early. Uh, so we could close on our bank loan. [Chuckles]

00:29:35 TM: Um, and, and, as you were setting out, um, in just thinking about aside from the, a business plan, would you say, what was your philosophy as a company? What kind of brewery did you want to be?

EB: At the time, you, in D.C., felt like the craft scene was so young that it was a little exclusive. So, we've really wanted to make sure that our, the driving principle behind our company was and still is that craft beer's for everyone. So, there's really no type in our eyes about who, um, who should be at, in our taprooms. Um, and so the first question I always ask somebody is just, "What kind of beer do you like to drink?" And sometimes the answer is Miller Lite. And I can be like, "Awesome. We have a really great American Lager, too." You know. So, just making the connections for people. Um, so that's, at, that is still the main driving principle. And it was something we were, that was kind of missing in the beer scene is not, a space for people to learn about beer in a place where they weren't expected to already know everything. Not that we always succeed at

that, and we're always working on how to get staff training and handling, you know, new customers where, way. But that's our, our driving principle for.

00:30:45 TM: And so, I think, um, certainly, in thinking about inclusivity in terms of education is one aspect to it. [Unintelligible] Thinking about inclusivity more broadly is, is certainly something of great importance today in beer. And, uh, so.

John Harry: Yeah, do, do, do you think there's a, uh, like, what makes a taproom or a brewery more inclusive? Or, or what are, what are those factors that you think play into it?

JV: I think one big factor is the variety of brands you have available for people to drink. And styles to drink. You know, if you look at our tap list right now, it's not just a bunch of IPAs. You know, we have an Oatmeal Stout. We have a Peach Berliner Weisse. And we do have a Pale Ale and an IPA. But we've got everything in between. Lagers. Pilsners. Etcetera. Um, having that variety of options. Like, variety of options available is gonna bring in people with different palates. I, I talk about this a lot, which maybe it's weird, I don't know, but, you know, in Silver Spring, um, Silver Spring it, itself is actually I think the world's largest population of Ethiopian people outside of the country of Ethiopia. And we have lots and lots of Ethiopian people who come and hang out in our taproom as customers. And one of the things that we have found is that, um, as a consumer group, they tend to really drink our Belgian Triple a lot. I think part of it is that in Eastern Africa, a lot of the alcoholic beverages are the higher alcohol, ABV, slightly sweeter on the palate. Um, and if you think about the Belgian Triple style, that is kind of akin to that, right? Um, and so, and that, and not that we decided we were gonna make a Triple because we happen to be in an area where there are a lot of Ethiopian folks. But, that seems to be one of our bestsellers in the taproom over in Silver Spring. Um, and I think that that's, that's an example of, like, if you're creating products for the community that you live in, that people want to drink, then you're going to be innately, you know, inclusive for people. I don't know if you guys would agree with that? Or have other opinions?

00:32:52 EB: Yeah, I think it's about the offerings. I think it's, you know, our staff. We really care a lot about our diversity in our own hiring. Again, not ever, not something I would say we, like, we're successful at a hundred percent yet, in term, in terms of having a totally diverse staff. But, you know, we think about it and we are thoughtful about who's representing the company. Um, and then just not, not assuming that there's this, this certain way people are supposed to look when they come in. You know? Not, this isn't craft beer, but we hosted one of our neighbors [unintelligible] medical marijuana, across the, you know, nearby, one of the dispensaries, for like a registration event. And the first people to walk in were some white ladies in their mid-60s. Right? Like, everybody, there's no, like, typi-, typical person. I mean, you know, and I think being open to whoever walks through your doors is what, um, makes a space safe for people to come in and ask questions and get to know their server and find out more about beer.

00:33:50 TM: And, so, on this topic, um, until recently, Julie, you chaired the Diversity Committee for the Brewers Association. And so, would you mind describing a little bit what, what that committee does?

JV: Sure.

TM: What it seeks to do?

JV: Yeah, I mean, I think our, our main goal is to try to figure out ways that craft beer can be more inclusive and welcoming to not only the folks out there in the world who drink our products, the consumers, but also internally in terms of the industry and who's making the products and working at the companies. Uh, you know, we, and we, we try to come up with different, um, initiatives to help increase that. So, just recently we launched for the first time this grant program where we gave out twenty thousand dollars-worth of grant funding to people who were throwing events that were focused on a more inclusive craft beer world. So, some of the, for example, some of them were festivals that were focused on, um, you know, targeting more female drinkers. Some of them were focused on, you know, targeting more, uh, African American beer drinkers and beer makers. And then another one that, another couple that we did were actually, uh, job fairs, where they were looking to recruit more diverse candidates to work in the craft beer world. Uh, and so that started this past year and that's only gonna get bigger and better as, as we go. So, that's just like an example of something we do.

00:35:10 TM: This is kind of a, a historical question, but from your perspective in the industry, why do you feel like the industry has, has evolved in, into something that is primarily white men?

JV: I think it, why it's turned into primarily white men, um, I don't know if I'm, like, expert enough to really answer that question. I, I do think that, you know, it is, beer is a commercial endeavor. And if you look at any industry, especially the United States, most industries [chuckles] are run by white men, historically. And I think as the population is changing and diversifying, um, that is slowly but surely changing. Uh, but I think that might be part of why, just historically, that's how it is. Um, yeah, I mean, that's what, that would be my answer for that.

JR: But where are the imports coming from? You know, craft beer was created in the U.S. by learning from imports from European countries. If it wasn't for that. And countries in, South American countries. Only recently have craft brewers tried to, I mean, like, you know, lagers created in Central America, South America, which for some reason originally came from Europe. So, it's like that, this is, you know. Um, that's my guess. [Unintelligible]

00:36:27 TM: To, alright, to switch back to the, the offerings you have. What is your current lineup of, of beers like now?

JR: Hmm?

TM: What, what is your current lineup of beers like now?

JR: Uh, you know, as any company, we have to adapt with time. So, we, I think kept true to the, our original, uh, just goal. I mean, four out of the, we originally had five core brands. We now have four core brands. And they have the same core brands that we created as the first batches in Silver Spring. And have they been tweaked? Yes. But, they have been, uh, tweaked to where they're representations of the style and, you know, hopefully are enjoyed by those who want that style. Seasonal wise, you know, we try to create things that, again, keep that, uh, diverse, uh, tap list where it's, you know, with ABV, with even just the color of the beer, um, anything like that, aromas, flavors, um, that's one of the things we keep striving for with product planning. Especially with more volume that we do. Um, so, we're still doing lagers. I mean, I love lagers. And I think that's the one thing between the three of us that we all love to drink. If I pour three, three lagers, all three of us will drink it.

JV: Yeah.

JR: Um, but, that's always been the focus, I think, here. I mean, history has shown, at least in the U.S., that a lot of people have [unintelligible] tended to drink lagers over ales. But, um, we have.

EB: Eighty-eight percent of the country drinks lagers.

[Laughter]

00:38:04 EB: You know? And when you look at what people are mostly drinking, it's mostly lagers. So, there are trends that we don't necessarily chase right now. Like, the Hazy IPA thing. We make IPAs. We've adjusted, you know, like as Jeff said, we've tried to sort of adjust to consumer preferences with our, you know, South Side that we've had since the beginning and then other IPAs and Pale Ales that we make. Um, but at the end of the day, most people drink lagers. And so, we're really sort of saying, I think that that's where the biggest room for growth is. If we truly want more and more people to be drinking local products and more and more people to be drinking craft and, we have to be making what people want. And that's what we want, too. So.

JV: Yeah.

EB: It works out.

00:38:45 JR: Yeah, I mean, right now on tap we have a Rye IPA, and ESB, a Czech Pilsner, a Belgian Triple, an Oatmeal Stout, the Peach Berliner Weisse, an American Premium Lager. Um.

JR: We always make Pilsner.

JV: Barrel-aged [unintelligible] culture. We've got a, you know, an Abbey Single. I mean, that, that's just like a broad range of stuff that we have going on. Um, and I do wanna say, like, just a, in terms of why I think it's important that we are inclusive, not only us as Denizens, but craft beer in general, is, you know, the population is becoming less and less white. Um, it is becoming, uh, there are fewer and fewer people that are drinking craft beer. Yes, craft beer is growing as a segment, but it's way slower than it was before in terms of growth. There are a lot more breweries that are around. Competition is getting a lot more tight. If we're all continuing to go after the exact same pie of people, it's gonna get even more difficult. It, I, it is important as a business imperative, not just a moral imperative, that breweries are expanding that pie as much as they possibly can. Um, and increasing who the consumers are that are drinking our products. And that's why, um, like Jeff and Emily were saying, we try to brew things that, what most consumers are enjoying. [Chuckles] It's important to do that.

TM: Well, and it seems, oh, sorry.

00:40:12 JR: I just don't want to interrupt, but we're also still doing [unintelligible] stuff from the original craft beer where we have cask beer at Silver Spring. And we throughout the year. You know. And that is the slowest selling style of beer I've ever seen.

[Laughter]

JR: But, you know, I think it's important because that was, like, at least when I was 21 and a craft brewer and seeing all these people that were ten years older than me who were into craft beer and drinking it, like, they were like, "Cask. What's wrong with cask?" I was like, yeah, sure. We got this Black IPA which is not even a thing anymore. You know, it's like.

[Laughter]

JR: [Unintelligible] [Laughs]

00:40:47 TM: Well, and that's what seemed throughout craft beer, it's a funny balance between, you know, what your, what you wanna drink as a brewer and what you want to teach people to like, hopefully, what people are asking for, because you need to pay your bills. Um, and so, I mean, your menu, it's like you said, it's so broad it seems to kind of hit all of those points to some extent.

EB: And in terms of like, you know, it's, it's not like it happens a hundred percent of the time, but if, it's happened to me like thirty percent of the time, which is a lot, is where someone will sit down and I can say like, "Hey." They'll say, "I don't like beer. I don't drink beer." I'm like, "Alright. Well, what do you like?" "Okay, I like wine." "Alright, let me give you a couple tastes of things that are kind, that are a similar flavor profile." And like thirty percent of the time people are like, "This is really good. I didn't realize this existed." So, like, to Julie's point, that conversa-, conversation needs to happen so that we can get more people drinking American beer. And, um, 'cause you know, Budweiser's not American beer. So, like, um, but, if we're just making Hazy IPAs and putting, like, Gushers in, in beer and things like that, I don't think we're gonna be successful at ultimately bringing in people to understanding there can be a, you know, a reliable core beverage they can go to in their supermarket that also is made ten miles away.

00:42:05 TM: Um, in terms of recipe formulation here, how does that process work at Denizens?

JV: Every once in a while Jeff will ask an opinion of the sales team. What are people drinking out there? Um, but most of the time it's Jeff coming up with ideas and, and his team. And you are, in my opinion, very successful at it.

JR: Well, I mean, I think, especially nowadays, like, maybe two, think about how many brands we've made that are completely new over the last few years. I think every single one of them has been a conversation.

JV: Sure.

JR: Now with the recipe formulation, it's pulling it from whatever information I can gather, whether it's in text, whether it's through friends, whether it's on, online. And then, you know, just my own consumption and anybody else's consumption. Which is why it's very critical that there's an R&D budget for, for staff to go taste beers.

[Laughs]

EB: Is this a budget request?

[Laughter]

JR: No. I used to have it at Mountain Sun. I just [unintelligible].

[Laughter]

JR: Tim, Tim's a big, big advocate for it, too.

EB: Okay.

JR: Um.

EB: Good to know.

[Laughter]

00:43:08 TM: Well, on, on this subject though of, of generating ideas for new recipes or new beers, where, where does that happen? Is it through travel? Or um?

JR: Drinking. Drinking and talking with people. You know? This, this industry, this, beverages that people are enjoying, it's not a creative vacuum by one person. You know? So, I cannot tell you how much I've learned over the years from people versus school or, I mean, I went to Siebel, um, when I was, like, I was brewing for a couple years. And great, great experience. Not, I'm not knocking it. But, having brewed for a couple years, going to Siebel, um, I would say that I learned a lot in the beginning of it. But when it came to the last parts of Siebel, I learned from just talking with other, my peers, and all that. Traveling to Germany. It's just cool. [Laughs]

00:44:00 TM: Um, can you recall one of these conversations or, or a trip you went on where you learned?

JR: [Unintelligible] No, I'm kidding. Um, they, they, they just start, um, especially when you're, I think, I'm sure it's with any industry, and if you've worked in, in different areas you've met people and hopefully you've gotten along with them. And those are the first conversations you have. I go to my friend. Like, if I go to Colorado, I go to my friend's breweries that were either my boss at some point, co-workers or worked at other breweries that have either grown in positions or opened small shops. And I just go and talk to them. "What are you guys doing?" You know? And, they don't keep it close to their chests. So, "This is what we're doing. Drink some." "Alright. Cool." [Chuckles]

00:44:42 TM: Um, what are you most excited about right now in terms of, uh, of brewing? Or an ingredient? Or a technique?

JR: Uh, you know what I'm excited for? Is more tank time. We have larger batches. We can, uh, give the maturation that it deserves. Um. And really being able to, it's like another part of recipe formulation you really can't calculate is time in the fermenter, time cold in the fermenter, time in the brite tank before packaging. And it's, it's not as, uh, sexy or anything like that. It's just physical properties, kind of, properties and. [Chuckles]

00:45:21 TM: Makes sense. Alright. Um, so, so we're sitting in your second facility, which is beautiful. And just opened in the spring of this year. And, so I wanted to ask about growth. As you mentioned, Julie, it's a, it's a highly competitive time in the

brewing industry. So, how would you describe your, your strategy or your attitude toward growth, uh, in this time?

JV: I'm gonna let Emily answer that.

EB: Well, the, um, we want to stay small. We definitely, you know, we're not small compared to if you actually look at all the breweries and how, what, production size, we're not that small anymore. But, compared to the actual large players in the industry, we're so small. So, we kinda wanna fly below the radar a little bit, and really stay in the DMV. Um, continue to make good beer. We think there's a lot of room for growth in just getting in more and more shops around D.C. and Maryland and Northern Virginia. Um, the size of the brewery here will really max out at fifteen-thousand barrels, and we think that's like a really good sweet spot where we can make the kind of beer we want to make at the quality we want to make it at. And earn, you know, earn a living for ourselves. But not be putting our, ourselves or our employees in a position where we don't have the ability to continue to sustain the business. We think this is, like, sort of a, a good level to be competing at nowadays. 'Cause you don't, you know, everybody knows what's happening. There were a series of acquisitions and, and now that we're starting to see some consolidations, um, between independent brewers, so, it will only get more and more competitive the further you get away from your home base. And, and frankly, that's where consumer trends are, too, because people want to, to know where things come from. People are trying to buy local. So, your brand has to, your distribution can only kinda match your brand awareness and the, and the, the footprint of that. Um, so, we think that we have the best shot at, at building that and expanding that brand just dig more deeply where we already are. Yeah.

00:47:22 TM: And in keeping customers and growing customers, do you feel like, um, being a locally produced beer is, is most of interest to them? Or, what, what is most important in terms of, um, attracting customers?

JV: I think that's a huge part of it. I think, you know, buy local, drink local, eat local. It's all kind of the, the rage.

EB: I think we're learning though what will matter for wholesale.

JV: Yeah.

EB: Because we have, we have very loyal, in Silver Spring we have extremely loyal taproom community that has been built over the last five years. And loyal in, in a two way street where we've done a lot I think for Silver Spring and that community has given back a lot, too. And just, just we had a party there Saturday night and it was really awesome to just see all these people coming together. Random people having a good time watching a bunch of random performances. It was a cool thing. And pretty unique.

JV: Folks were there that were there like our opening weekend.

EB: Right.

JV: That were there [unintelligible]. It was really cool.

00:48:15 EB: Um, so those people, of course, when they see our beer out at the store will buy it. Because they, we have this connection, affinity year round, the experience we've had together. So, you know, as we get further afield and, you know, are distributing more in Baltimore and Annapolis and places where people haven't been in our taproom, I think that is the next step we're sort of going to have to, to figure out as, like, how to tell our story and get, and make that connection with people further away. But at the end of the day, our, we're banking on the fact that you can buy our Pilsner in January and you can buy it in June, and it'll taste the exact same. It'll always be available. It'll be reasonably priced. And that that's the best way to kind of build a following. We're not gonna have, like, limited release, you have to get in a line, you can, you can only get it if you know the date it's happening. That's not really our style. We want to be reliable and available.

TM: Right.

JV: Mmhmm.

TM: Rather than specialized and exclusive.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Alright.

JV: Think about how exhausting that is, too.

JR: [Laughs]

JV: I mean, just, like, every weekend. New can release! And you're like, having to like [unintelligible] up people to get excited about it. And just, that stresses me out to even think about.

TM: [Chuckles] Alright.

JV: Just from a logistical perspective.

00:49:23 TM: Uh, you've mentioned the importance of your taprooms as the centerpiece of your, your business model in a lot of ways. And so, if, if someone walked into one of your taprooms at, whatever time, 5pm on a Saturday, or 8pm, what, what would it look like? Who is there?

JV: Hopefully a lot of people. Um. [Laughs] I think, and time will tell here in Riverdale Park. Um, Silver Spring, I can tell you from the past five years, it's, you got all different ages, different ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations. You name it. Um, you know, Emily was talking about earlier how to, how we had this, like, registration open house for the local medical, medical marijuana dispensary. What she didn't mention is what was happening upstairs, up. We have two taprooms, two levels of a taproom in Silver Spring. And the upstairs part of the taproom was also throwing, I think like, an agnostic Bible study at the same time. So, you got these, like, very different. We try to. [Chuckles] We, it's not that we're trying to be all things to all people. It's that Silver Spring is such a diverse community that you kinda have to have that, like, flexibility in terms of the offerings you have. You know, we do a monthly drag show. And, that's really, it's a hu-, there's a large LGBT, or, um, community in Silver Spring. And in this area, too. And we're doing, we're starting drag brunch here in Riverdale. And, at the end of the month there's a card writing club.

[Laughter]

EB: Yeah, there's like a, a letter writing society.

[Laughter]

JV: It's a, it, you know, I think because we try to throw, throw events and, you know, people have ideas for events. We can welcome them and say, "Yes, you can use this space." You know, really, truly be that third space and community place. Um, it, it tends to bring in people from all walks of life, and we're trying to emulate that same philosophy here in Riverdale Park. So, hopefully it will be like that, too.

00:51:17 TM: Um, and you, you've mentioned mostly your, your reach beyond the space of the taproom. Your, your outreach to communities. And so, um, the, the, the big question is what role do you think breweries can play in, in communities? Whether it's local or regional or beyond?

EB: When we serve, for us, we serve as like a, a gathering space, as Julie has said quite a bit. So, we do offer our space basically at no cost, um, to non-profits, to fundraisers, and such. And I've seen breweries nationally, you know, like, [unintelligible] fires in California. I think there's a role, there's a very easy role where community [unintelligible], a taproom is a gathering place already. And so, piggybacking on that to raise money for a cause. Um, and then for us, too, you know, we obviously speak out a lot for small businesses. Um, we lobby quite a bit in Maryland to make things better for small business. And we also are, we'll take political stands on issues that, um, I, you know, publicly. Which some businesses don't do. And I don't really understand why, especially in the D.C. area. You know, it's pretty, when you're [unintelligible], you're talking about immi-

immigrants rights and things like that. It's sort of like, this is not that complicated or political, but, you know, why don't. So, we do think that there's an abil-, there's a space for. I mean, try to keep it really clean and on, like, you know, a very clear line around, like, right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That's, um, we will take political stances on issues in order to.

TM: And what format does that take? How do you?

EB: Fundraisers that we've hosted. Um, political statements that we'll make. Um.

JV: Social media. [Unintelligible]

EB: On social media. Things like that.

JV: Yeah. Signage we put up in the taproom. Things like that. For sure. Non-profits that we choose to support.

00:53:05 TM: Um, a question, a question about the, the employee culture here. What is it like to be, to work at Denizens?

JV: Um, I think it, generally speaking, I think that we have high expectations. So, I think that there's like a culture of, this is where we need you to be. Um, I, and I think that you really need to have that culture in any small business, because you don't have millions and bajillions of dollars [chuckles] to, you know, cover up when someone's not being, um, successful in their position. Uh, I also think that it's fun. I think it's creative. I think that people have a lot of runway to not just sort of do rote things, but also really, you know, have fun with it. You know, our events manager has a lot of fun to come up with different parties she wants to throw or events she wants to do with the community. And, um, our sales team gets, you know, has a lot of runway to figure out what type of accounts they want to sell to. What type of events they want to throw. Which is a paid in outside of the taprooms and our breweries, you know, in general. [Unintelligible] Add to that as well.

EB: Yeah, and I think part of being, like, a small business and a growing business that you have to, each individual employee charts their own path a little bit to [unintelligible] for everybody. Um, but, I think the team that we have is pretty fun in that they all have some entrepreneurial aspects to their interests and what brought them to craft beer as well. So, like, we try to give people the space to pursue that stuff.

JR: You want me to answer?

[Laughter]

TM: If you want. You don't have to.

00:54:43 JR: Well, it's been, it, I will say this, at least in the brewery, um, it's always been a brewery at Silver Spring where on the production side, that we've been doing a lot of through put. Um, I think now with having the two locations, especially now, there's a lot of growth for individuals to really grow within the company instead of leaving the company to go grow to another position. There are, and there will only continue to do that. But we, we try to hire positions, uh, where we don't over hire and just have a bunch of labor. We really, I think as owners, we, we are operators. And this is, just, not just in the brewery, this is, we are operators. And, until we are able to allow our staff to grow to those, or, or our staff is like fulfilling those levels, we will always be that support to them. Um, but the goal is to have our staff.

EB: Take over.

JR: Take over!

[Laughter]

00:55:41 JV: I think part of it, too, I mean, it's funny when we were first having this conversation and you were confirming what are your titles, and Jeff was like, "Yeah, I don't really know. I guess that's my title." Um, one of the reasons that we're calling ourselves chief now, which, I, feels uncomfortable and awkward to me. 'Cause like, we're like this small business and like, "I'm the Chief Brand Officer." It just, it feels weird. But, from a sort of HR perspective, you know, if I'm still the Director and I'm not the Chief, what does that mean for anyone who works underneath me. They can only become a manager if I still am in that position, right? So, in order to create a runway for people to actually grow in the company, that's partly why we did that, in terms of changing our titles. And that was all Emily's idea.

EB: [Unintelligible]

JV: [Laughs]

EB: Not [unintelligible]. But that, you know, but that we had to, you know, formalize our roles.

JV: Right.

EB: It's obvious.

[Laughter]

EB: [Unintelligible]

00:56:33 TM: Well, kind of along these lines, you know, it's interesting because your brewery is also very much a family affair. And.

JV: Yeah.

TM: And, so, one question is how you balance work and family? And, and relationships and business?

[Laughter]

EB: Um, it, you know, we get along really well after five years. But we definitely got to, to that place where we, um, you know, can move through disagreements or, you know, different opinions about things. Um, and, you know, obviously Julie and I have the biggest challenge because we go home to the same place. So, we, it's always a work in progress on learning when to say, like, "I'm not interested in talking about the business now. Like, we need to shut this conversation off." We just have to do that. But, I think, you know, it's been nice over the last few years to, like, get to a place where we really are a team. We might have different opinions or different experiences, but at the end of the day, like, we really support one another and the business.

JV: I think we respect each other's different skill sets, too. You know? I mean, we all have very different things that we're good at. Things we need help with. So.

EB: Being part of it, it, you know, it's a double-edged sword because you can cross a line with people more easily than you would, uh, if you were all strangers. But you also have a security blanket.

[Laughter]

EB: But you also have this sort of, this safety net thing that like you really can't go too far.

[Laughter]

JV: [Unintelligible] Giving me up. [Unintelligible]

EB: We all are just sitting in front of each other in a totally different setting and make sure it still works. Um, so, it keeps, I think, or, keeps us honest with each other. And keeps us in line, too, a little bit.

00:58:21 JR: I met them early. I would say, to be honest, I've learned more through working with Emily and Julie than I have before working with them. I knew them, I would say, the, the family aspect, I knew them, but I knew, I, they allowed me to live in their home when meeting me, I don't know, in person four times? [Laughs]

JV: Like a year or so.

[Laughter]

JR: Maybe. So.

JV: Starting a business is risky.

JR: Yeah. We jumped right in.

[Laughter]

JR: And, yeah. That's the, live, live with them for, what, January through August?

JV: Yeah.

JR: They were, they were nice enough to allow me to live in their furnished second story.

[Laughter]

JV: You me taught me about Greyhounds.

JR: Yeah.

JV: The drink, not the dogs.

[Laughter]

JV: Uh, you helped with the lawn sometimes.

JR: Yeah. I did the dishes for maybe a week. And um.

[Laughter]

TM: And now you have a brewery. So. [Unintelligible]

JV: Yeah. Exactly.

TM: Did you want to ask a question about? Surprising?

JH: Yeah. Yeah. Well, what, what was the most surprising thing when, uh, when you did start the brewery? Did this, was there something that was like, oh, I didn't think about that?

JV: This is very, very small, uh, but the day we opened our taproom in Silver Spring, that morning I realized we don't have any rags. Like, oh, crap. We gotta run. I had to run over to, like, Costco or Home Depot and buy like a big thing of those like rags that you can get. That's obviously not a big thing, but that was the first thing I thought of when you said, "What was surprising?" There's a, I, I guess the part of it is like there's so many small things that go into every single day. You know, as a customer, as a consumer that walks into a brewery or a, you know, interacts with a can at a package store, you know, you don't see any of that, right? But like, all the little things that go on. Every conversation and email and text and phone call. Like, are we sure we want that design to be right there before it goes to printing? And then, it's, you know, you put the beer in it and you're drinking it in the store. Um, I don't know. I think that's just like a very real example for me of, like, how there's all these little things that go around all the time.

JH: Do you? I'm sorry. Do you think that the attention to detail is maybe what separates more successful craft breweries from less successful craft breweries?

JV: I think the thing in the long term, and again, talk to me in five years, prove me right or wrong here, the people who care enough and pay attention enough to the details, to do their own thing and chart their own course, as opposed to riding the coat tails of other people. Um, so, for example, this big trend that's been happening recently with craft brewers doing just straight up intellectual property theft on all of their cans and their branding and. That to me I think is not gonna bode well for them as a company. The breweries that are trying to create their brand, to create their stuff from scratch, and really have a lot of thought into it. And, um, this is a little self-serving of a statement because I'm describing our business model here, but, you know, we don't release new cans every week, or every month even, or every quarter even. We have, we put a lot of thought process into which brands do we think the consumers want, that we think will be, you know, good for us to make in terms of who we are as a company. And then also cost of goods sold and all of those things. And then think a lot about the packaging design. And thinking about the branding and the launch and all of that. I think that is gonna set us up successfully more so in the future than if we were just coming up with some funny, trendy pun where we don't have to, have to think about any of that stuff because someone else already made it for us, so we're just sort of stealing it or borrowing it. I don't know.

01:02:13 EB: What surprised me is that, like, how it does not, uh, there's no like plateau with running your own business. Um, at all. So, that's been surprising. You know, five years in to be like, wow, sometimes I feel like I've clearly, like, we've learned, we've all learned so much. And I feel like I've gone through so much personal growth. And I've learned so much in five years. Like, probably worth, honestly, like twenty years of my former professional life. But, you know, it's not stopping. So, like, my goal, you know, at, at the five year juncture is to figure out, like, alright, just cons-, constantly iterate and improve so that I can get to a place where it's a little bit more predictable and I don't feel like I'm always sort of like a

pinball kind of bouncing around between, like, putting out fires and, you know. And we're always working on, you know, [unintelligible] planning and, and putting systems in place. But, it's never enough. So, sometimes when people, like, talk about their weekends and then also say they want to open a business, I'm like, "I don't think you understand. That concept goes away."

[Laughter]

01:03:15 EB: The feeling you have, I say to my friends sometimes, like, the feeling you have on like a Friday, I don't feel that anymore. Like, I've lost, I've not felt that in five years. So, that's something that, like, people really have, especially if you're starting now 'cause it's only more competitive. You really have to be willing to say to yourself, like, yeah, I'm good with, like, never having a holiday. Like, you know? Like, the, the four day break you get over the Fourth of July or whatever? How that, good that used to feel when I had a nine to five? That doesn't happen anymore, because we're open and we're serving people and I'm, I'm worrying about the staff have off, and which I have to cover for, and who, you know, what's gonna break over the weekend? And not to complain, but it is hard, you know? So, I think that's been the most surprising thing, is that, like, there's no just sort of like sprint. You open and it settles down. It just, life happens. [Chuckles]

JV: Anything surprised you?

JR: Uh, I guess. Surprised? Or learned? 'Cause like?

JV: I didn't ask the original question.

JR: Except. I mean. I don't know. That's.

[Laughter]

01:04:17 JR: I feel like going into this, there was like all these things of like, rags and all that. I was working in the brewery restaurants and it just, it was there, I was like, "Yeah, that happens." But, when it all happens, there's just so much that can just pull you away. And then you get nothing done. And I think that's something that can be very difficult and this is to stay focused. Um, 'cause there's so many little things that can draw your attention away. And, I think for me, at least, is not focusing on each individual pint, but as the operation, like, as a whole, from start to finish, and, I was, I was actually speaking to Tim about it, about with canning, which is probably the least experience I have in, in packing, in brewing in general over the years, is just putting beer in cans. And it's like, you focus on every can, and then like, "Oh, is that one okay? That one okay?" It really can get you down instead of looking at, alright, why is that issue happening? Let's focus on the issue. Let's invest time in setting up systems, training, uh, putting stuff in, like, down on now not paper, on computer, but you know, like, just available so that we learn and we invest time up front so that it can just operate. And, I feel like all

of us have done that and it still continues to be a need. And, but, hopefully, because we're not opening a third one.

[Laughter]

JR: That those, that learning to invest in this stuff early on, early on, that we'll get more of that back to us, um, than in our first five year [unintelligible].

[Laughter]

01:05:54 TM: Alright, two, two questions to wrap up on. Um, the first is that the museum where we work, of course, thinks in objects. And we, we show objects to the public when they come in. People, scholars use objects to, to study and to research and to think. And so, if you, if there, could you name an object or objects that you feel have been so important to the history of Denizens? Or to your own history as a, as, as a founder of a brewery? Is there something that you could name?

JR: You said objects?

TM: Yeah. A thing.

JV: Sorry. I'm just trying to. [Chuckles] [Unintelligible] You have to think about this. Um. Maybe the lift gate from our first pickup? Which we're never gonna see again? Uh. [Chuckles] 'Cause it got totaled a few weeks ago.

[Chuckles]

JV: Um.

[Laughter]

JV: Uh.

EB: Where are the tags?

JV: Where are the tags? That's a good question. I need to call the insurance company. Um, oh man. I think anything that's sort of like semi broken and used would be something that would make you think of that. Uh, or answer your question. And I can't think of any one in particular, 'cause it's the object. Just sort of, you know, when we started, we bootstrapped everything. We couldn't get the, we asked for a million dollars from the bank. They were like, "You can have \$500,000." Right? You know, we, we wanted to get certain terms in our lease. The landlord was like, "Take it or leave it." You know? There's just, you had maybe, we made do with what we could. You know? We paid our friends in pizza and beer and they helped paint the whole building. So, we saved five thousand

dollars there. So, I, I guess things always, when I think about the beginning of the company and sort of building it to where it is now, I think a lot about getting a lot of use out of objects that probably should've been thrown away a long time ago, but it's like, this is all you've got. So you gotta make do with it.

TM: Makes sense.

JV: Yeah.

01:07:53 JR: I have one. The five meter Velo filter we have at Silver Spring. Uh, in my head was a necessity when we opened. And it was. It turned our beer around. However, continuing to learn in this industry, what diatomaceous earth does to beer, which is the filter [unintelligible], let alone just the stress that beer goes under, we are now, we are continuing to turn around our Pilsner in the same amount of time by using [unintelligible]. You know. It's looking as if it's as clear as that and the beer is not better because [unintelligible]. And now we have this huge filter I don't know what to do with.

EB: Sweet.

JR: [Laughs]

01:08:41 EB: Mine's probably my computer, because I had to teach myself accounting. I had to, like, spend a lot of time on it. So, I think, like, the, the screen of QuickBooks on my computer would be like my symbol, I think.

JR: Getting a touchscreen. [Laughs]

EB: Getting a touchscreen computer is really big for Jeff.

01:09:02 TM: Okay. And last question. This is, um, also a, a, one that might make you think, and, and that's to ask you what you value most about what you do?

JV: I value the relationships and people, um, whether they are employees of ours. Whether it's, you know, Emily and I have a new level of intimacy in our marriage just from going through this together. In the relationship I have with Jeff and how close we've become. Um, and then, honestly, like, our customers, our staff. Part of it is, you know, I'm a people person. That's sort of where I, and that's probably why I do the sales for the company, 'cause that's where I start from. And I would say that for me is the thing that I value the most, is, is people.

JR: Uh, I'm gonna go the, the similar route in the sense of when I originally wanted to open a brewery, whatever that meant at age 21, 20, 21, um, it was not because I was like, "This is my beer." And this is, whatever it was. Because I liked what I saw around it. Um, at least what I saw around the restaurant industry in, in the brewery setting and all that. Um, now I'd dive deeper into that. There's

worse things you see into it. And all this stuff. But, um, no matter what, when you go through all of that stuff with anybody, whether it's an employee, you know, business partner, anything like that, um, and you stay together in some sort of relationship, you're better for it. So, I don't know, I, I try to be an employer with working in the brewery, but also I try to engage and learn about people and, you know, we, there was a person that I trained, just, uh, from the beginning, five years, left before this expansion. I think it was the right move for 'em to learn more. Um, but consider a friend. And, he will still reach out [unintelligible].
[Laughs]

EB: I like, um, the autonomy I have every day. So, I, every day I decide what I'm going to do. Which is, you don't get other than doing something like this.
[Unintelligible] Makes it worthwhile to deal with the other headaches that you sometimes deal with.

TM: Alright, well thank you all so much for your time. This has been great.

EB: Thank you.

JV: Thank you for speaking with us.

TM: Thank you.

JV: Hope it helps your project.