

Names of Interviewees: Eric McKay and Patrick Murtagh  
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Name of Interviewer: Theresa McCulla  
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Theresa McCulla: It's August 30, 2018. This is Theresa McCulla of the National Museum of American History. I am interviewing Eric McKay, president and co-founder and Patrick Murtagh, brewmaster and co-founder of Hardywood Park Craft Brewery. We're 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, Eric, we'll start with you. When and where were you born?

Eric McKay: I was born in Goshen, Connecticut. Raised in Goshen, Connecticut. Born in Torrington, technically. In June, June 22nd, 1980.

McCulla: And, what were your parents' names?

McKay: Jim McKay and Eileen McKay.

McCulla: And, what was it like growing up where you did?

McKay: I grew up, I had a pretty unique childhood. I grew up in a small town of about two thousand people. And from the time I was six, we lived on a lake called Woodridge Lake, which was kind of a magical place, I'd say. From the summertime, it was a pretty vibrant community with a lot of New Yorkers, primarily, that had summer homes there, which involved everything from swimming, sailing, meeting new friends, catching frogs and having frog jumping races. And, I really enjoyed my childhood. Had two brothers, Andy and Chris, that I grew up spending a lot of time with. And, some of my earliest memories with Patrick Murtagh and his sister Erin, and some of our other friends from the lake.

McCulla: And, what did your parents do?

McKay: My dad is a family doctor. And mom is a nurse.

00:01:45 McCulla: Okay. And, again, to your childhood, what do you recall about things you might have eaten or drunk as a kid?

McKay: Again, you know, going to the lakeside theme, growing up in the outdoors, having a lot of backyard barbeques, burgers, hamburgers, every summer ended with a weenie roast down at the, the clubhouse at the lake. And, remember eating hot dogs roasted over the fire and marshmallow 'smores and, and didn't have many restaurants in the Goshen area. But, so, yeah. It was interesting, memorable.

McCulla: Do you, was beer a part of the social life of your town or your family?

McKay: So, my parents didn't really drink much. But, certainly events like the weenie roast, you know, beer was a part of it, but not really a memorable part of it to my knowledge. I'd say my first experiences with beer, with beer, were probably at friend's parties, older friend's parties when they got access to, maybe some of their parents' beer, and passed it around. I think Piels was the first beer I remember drinking at a friend Rachel's eighteenth birthday party.

00:03:10      McCulla: And, where did you go to school?

McKay: I went to Goshen Center School growing up. Town Hill School in early elementary, and then Goshen Center School. Went to Wamogo Regional High School for middle school, and then I went to Loomis Chaffee in Windsor, Connecticut for high school, and then to Davidson College in North Carolina for undergrad, and Fordham University for graduate school.

McCulla: Okay. And what did you study as a, in college?

McKay: I studied economics in college, and business in graduate school.

00:03:42      McCulla: Okay. Alright, Patrick, we'll switch to you for a moment. When and where were you born?

Murtagh: I was born in New York City, July 17th, 1979.

McCulla: And what were your parents' names?

Murtagh: James Murtagh and Alice Murtagh.

McCulla: And what did they do?

Murtagh: My dad's an actor and my mom's a nurse.

00:04:01      McCulla: Okay. And what was it like growing up in New York City where you did?

Murtagh: New York was great. I mean, it was, from what I hear, a fairly different growing up experience. We were definitely a lot more independent from an early age. I remember the big, defining moment of independence was being able to walk to school and walk home. I went to school about five blocks from where I grew up, so, it was kind of a fun thing for me. And then, as a teenager, you know, probably allowed to go out a little earlier on your own, you didn't rely on somebody to drive you places. And, and you just got to see a lot. You were

around some of the best museums in the country and a lot of diversity. So, it was, yeah, fairly unique, but [unknown] standard growing up experience.

00:04:51 McCulla: And, what do you recall about eating and drinking as a kid?

Murtagh: My mom was a big cook. She cooked all the time. Probably a lot of Italian food. Learned to cook from her, learned to appreciate cooking. We ate at home a lot. We, we ate out occasionally, didn't go to too much outside of our neighborhood for food, but, yeah, I mean, probably cooking is the biggest food experience for me. Home-, homemade meals I guess you could say.

Thanksgiving, of course. My mom would start cooking morning, go out and see the Thanksgiving Day Parade, and come back and the whole house would smell like turkey. So, yeah, food was definitely a big part of my life, life. Not necessarily dining out, but.

McCulla: And to what extent was beer part of the social life of your, your family or your community?

Murtagh: I mean, my parents drank beer. But, they were probably more into wine than beer. And, you know, as a teenager you start to try beers, but yeah, until I got a little bit older, beer wasn't really a part of, you know, my family life.

00:06:08 McCulla: Sure. Right. And so, where did you go to school and what did you study?

Murtagh: I went to the Browning School, basically third grade through, through graduation. And then I went to the University of New Hampshire and studied hospitality management there. And then later on, before we started Hardywood, I attended Siebel Institute in Chicago for brewing and, and the Doemens Academy just outside of Munich, Germany.

00:06:35 McCulla: And I'd love, I'd love to hear more about those experiences in particular. What-, you have brewmasters in your family. Is that-?

Murtagh: Yeah, my great-great-grandfather, Lewis Kuhn, came to this country from Germany in 1890 and was the brewmaster of Springfield Breweries, which was kind of a conglomerate, merged group of breweries in Massachusetts. And, so, he worked there right up until Prohibition running production for them. And then a little bit after Prohibition, kind of a side note to that, the brewery potentially owned by Theodor Geisel, whose son was Theodor Geisel Jr. also known as Dr. Seuss.

McCulla: Right.

Murtagh: And, then his son, my great-grandfather, was a brewer. He actually went to Siebel in 1908. And, he was a brewer at the Wayne Brewery in Pennsylvania.

Erie, Pennsylvania. And then, my great-uncle, his son, my mother's uncle, this is all on my mother's side of the family, was a brewer for Koehler's in Erie, Pennsylvania. And he also studied brewing at Siebel, I believe in the 1930s.

00:07:58 McCulla: Does your family hold records or?

Murtagh: Well, yeah, I didn't really find out about any of that brewing history until after I started homebrewing. It's possible my mother mentioned it in passing, but it was probably after Eric and I started homebrewing after college. It, my families obituary of my great-great-grandfather, so it kind of gave his whole biography of his, and it was fascinating, obviously, to get into something, in this hobby, and then find out that it has some family ties. It's exciting. And, again, my mom might've told me there were some other brewers in the family, but she didn't know much about them. And, it wasn't until 2010 when I went to Siebel that, one day, couple weeks into the classes at Siebel and I heard my aunt was in Chicago, my Aunt [unknown]. And, she said, "How's Siebel going?" I was like, "Great." She's like, "Oh, my, my grandfather, great-grandfather went there. And my uncle, your great-uncle went there." No, I had no idea. And, sure enough, two feet from where I'd been sitting the last couple weeks was this composite picture from my great-grandfather's class. And one of the pictures was my great-grandfather. And then, then a little further down the wall was a composite picture of my great-uncle.

McCulla: That's amazing.

Murtagh: Yeah. So, yeah, that's, again, exciting to see that you're on the right path, I guess you could say.

00:09:24 McCulla: Well, and, and so to back up a bit, you, how, how did you meet each other? And, and when did the homebrewing begin?

Murtagh: So, we.

McKay: Yeah, I don't remember meeting Patrick. I mean, I was probably two, two or three years old when our parents became friends. So, Patrick's older sister Erin's the same age as my older brother, and so, we kinda naturally just became friends. So, on weekends and all summer long we'd pal around as kids and, I think we got some of our first jobs around the same time as lifeguards at the lake, and teaching swimming lessons, and, and, yeah. I think that friendship really remained. And homebrewing didn't start until after we both tried our first craft beer. When we'd both had a number of different brands of beer, but it was primarily just adjunct lager up until that point. At the time we were growing up there were only maybe eighty or so breweries in the country. And our first homebrewed beer was at a farmhouse in Australia, called Hardywood Park. The namesake now for our company. And, it was also our epiphany beer. That kind of beer that sparked that enthusiasm and the kind of fascination with the fact that

beer could be made on this, such a small scale, and it could have so much complexity and character and could taste delicious. Beer up until that point for us was kind of a flavorless beverage that really kind of served the purpose of being a social lubricant. And, wasn't really something that could be enjoyed from a more culinary perspective. And so, we immediately became fascinated, again, having been friends for a long time, we both were kind of seen by many of our teachers as being more the dreamers, or the, you know, kids that are often daydreaming and, I think we always had ideas about wanting to create something one day and start a business. And, and I think that started to, you know, build a real direction for us in terms of how we felt we could create a business when we started homebrewing, which was just a, a really enjoyable, fun thing to do from the act of coming up with a recipe, to creating it, to sharing it with friends.

00:11:51 McCulla: Can I ask a bit more about this epiphany beer? What, what were the circumstances like when you were sampling this beer? You know, where were you? What did it taste like?

Murtagh: Well, we were on a sheep farm in Australia. So, surroundings might've played into our enjoyment of the beer. But, at the time I swear it was the most delicious beer I'd ever tasted.

McKay: It helped that you're kind of halfway across the world in this very unique environment that I was, I did my junior year fall semester abroad in, in Sydney, Australia. And the orientation trip for that program started at-, with a farm stay. And my farm stay was with the Crawford family. David and Kay and their three daughters at Hardywood Park, and they were a wonderful family. Kay was an amazing cook. And the experience started with arriving at their home and having the first chore being feeding their orphan kangaroo, Joey, which-, and Sammy, who was just the cutest thing imaginable. And I think I realized right then that it was gonna be a pretty special experience. And, spent three separate visits with the Crawford's and became quite close with them while being over there. The second visit was with Rebecca, my wife now. And I, each took, the, have different farm tasks to help out with all day long. And the visits ended with a delicious meal and David's homebrewed beer, which was what we later found out patterned after Cooper's Sparkling Ale, which was a popular Australian beer. But, an amber ale with a lot of malty complexity. And, the third trip there was with my mom who had come over to Australia to sort of travel with me for a couple weeks before returning to the U.S. And Patrick and a friend of his. And, we enjoyed some of the unique tasks. I think at the time we were delousing sheep.

00:14:04 Murtagh: Yeah, basically, taking these sheep and pushing them under the conveyor belt and letting them drop in a delousing solution and getting them out the other side. So, for a native New Yorker it was quite the unique experience.

McKay: Getting a four-wheeler and herding a couple thousand sheep into a paddock and, yeah, having never driven a four-wheeler before, it was a really

unique, interesting place. And, and again, you know, that, that beer I think definitely was the inspiration behind wanting to brew. And, the Crawford family has since sold the farm. And so, when we were preparing to open and trying to come up with an appropriate name that we felt kind of, you know, shared some of the back story about how the company came to be, I reached out to them and asked how they felt about Hardywood Park being sort of brought back to life as the name of the brewery, and they were just tickled. So, they, continue to keep in touch with the-, the whole family. And David actually came to the U.S. about two years ago and came to visit us in Richmond and we had a great visit with him and hope that we can get the rest of the family over here at some point.

00:15:26 McCulla: It seems like the decision to name your brewery after their farm is, is about more than the beer itself that you tasted there. But, but the larger experience perhaps.

McKay: It was. Yeah. And I think that was a parallel with a lot of our memorable experiences growing up. Just being kind of out, you know, in, in the, in nature, surrounding this lake, and, and I think those passions have also come together largely to build sort of the, the concept for the West Creek brewery, which is where we're sitting now.

Murtagh: Yeah, I mean, I loved growing up in New York, but getting up to Connecticut on the weekends in the summer was just some of the best memories of my life. Being in the country, catching frogs, and just running around in the woods. So, so yeah, that sort of outdoorsy experience was definitely memorable, [unintelligible] theme for, you know, how we wanted to kind of surround ourselves and make it like a theme of the brewery.

00:16:39 McCulla: So, when you started homebrewing together, how did you learn about how to brew?

McKay: Charlie Papazian's book, I'd say was the first step. There were, you know, a number of books on homebrewing at the time. But, not a tremendous amount. A lot of it was still learning through, you know, talking with other homebrewers. And, there was a homebrew shop. I was finishing my last year of college, and Homebrew.com was a homebrew shop in Charlotte, North Carolina. The only homebrew shop in the area and that's where our first homebrewing kit came from. And, a lot of it was chatting with, I remember, Ale was what the own-, owner of the store went by. And a lot of it was chatting with him and getting ideas. And, they did also have recommended recipes for a specific styles of beer. You could order a kit. Started out with a lot of extract kits where you're getting malt extract, and then a small amount of grain, craft grains, you could kind of get the experience of extracting sugars from grain without all the mess of a, you know, an all-grain batch. But that quickly evolved to all-grain brewing for us, and I think we were pretty voraciously reading any book that came out on beer and

homebrewing and, and meanwhile kind of casually looking at opportunities to work in the industry.

00:18:19 McCulla: And what did you find to be the most challenging aspect of brewing to learn?

Murtagh: I think just making good beer consistently is the most challenging aspect. I think, you know, on a very basic level, you, mash and create sugars and ferment them into alcohol. But, once you start learning more about it, you realize there's very little you know about it. And, so, I think just completely understanding every little part of the process, and why things happen, help you to understand what you're doing, make better beer, and I think the more challenging it got, the more fun it got, 'cause then you started thinking about mash temperatures and pH and adjusting the water profile, what those little changes might do to your beer, however small the change, it's fun to be able to fine tune that, that flavor so much, and it's just such a perfect blend of sort of kind of the parallel to baking and cooking, where you're a little bit of that, little bit of this, but then also just being cognizant of the science behind what kind of reactions are taking place and how to perfect those. So, that, that, that became really fascinating, I think the more you study, the more you, yeah.

McKay: Yeah, I think the first time we officially fermented wort into beer, we felt by that point that we knew an awful lot about beer. And, pretty quickly thereafter I think started realizing how little we actually knew about beer and how many variables there were that could change the ultimate finished product, and it's been a, you know, it was exciting time to focus on getting those variables right and, that's something we're still toying with today.

00:20:13 McCulla: And Patrick, what prompted you to want to go to Siebel and to study brewing professionally?

Murtagh: Well, I think, as Eric said, a lot of our experience after we started homebrewing was trying to learn the sales and marketing side of things, understand side of things, you understand sort of how you sold beer and market it. So, we spent a lot of time doing that. And, that whole time we were homebrewing, and reading as much as we could on brewing, but, I just, I guess, wanted to have a deeper understanding of the process. We weren't going to learn from the books. And, so, yeah, so decided to enroll into program. It was, yeah, it was, it was a fascinating program actually. Studying something you're truly fascinated by.

00:21:08 McCulla: Could you talk a bit, especially, about the experience of being in Germany, studying and, and apprenticing.

Murtagh: Yeah, I mean, so, Siebel was a lot more theoretical studying, sensory analysis type of stuff. And then when we got to Germany as part of this program,

at Doemens Academy, it was a lot more hands-on brewing and chemistry and, like, the biology, understanding the packaging process. And, so, learning from these people that have, a lot of them have Ph.D.'s in, in various brewing sciences, brewing the latest sciences, and I think just learning in, one, being in the center of, of classic brewing was fascinating. You were able to visit a lot of breweries. We did lot of tours with some of these older breweries, all through Germany and then Austria and Czech Republic. And, learning from the German perspective was pretty fascinating, too. The way they all adhered to Reinheitsgebot was, was pretty interesting. And what they thought of American brewers and brewing.

00:22:28 McCulla: What did they think of American brewers?

Murtagh: I think they thought it was fascinating. I think, I can't remember which brewery it was, I think it was, we saw one that was putting gummybears in one of their beers at the time that they just cannot wrap their heads around. But, I think they appreciated some of the-, I don't know, they might've, I don't know if they considered it shortcuts or ways of achieving things that they could achieve through other means, through more Reinheitsgebot, appropriate methods in terms of adjusting pH and stuff like that. But, yeah, just, just really fascinated in knowing, getting to hear their just really deep understanding of the brewing process. Fermentation, and all that.

00:23:28 McCulla: And Eric, I'll ask about your career path and then how you opened Hardywood Park.

McKay: So, studying economics at Davidson, I followed the path of a lot of other econ majors and went to work for, in the financial side of things. I moved to New York City, and was working for a hedge fund called C Carriers and it was the summer of 2003 and it was kind of a slow time in the market, and a time when I had the opportunity to keep homebrewing and daydreaming about working in the beer industry and starting-, maybe starting a brewery one day. And, happened upon a job posting for a company called Union Beer Distributors in Brooklyn, which, they didn't have a website. The only information I could find out about them was that they were an Anheuser Busch distributor, which wasn't necessarily the side of the industry I was the most interested in, but I applied for the position as a sales rep and went out to interview and to discover that they had just acquired the rights to the Craft Brewer's Guild portfolio from Brooklyn Brewery, which at the time, Brooklyn Brewery had been distributing their own beer and they had sort of slowly and steadily built up the rights to some really fantastic brands of beer in New York City, most notably Sierra Nevada, was their biggest brand. And they also had some excellent imported beers, ranging from Schneider to Lindemans, the Lambic beers, Chemay, Duvel. Their other American beers at the time, including Allagash and Victory and Stoudt's from Pennsylvania, Abita, and, and they also happened to distribute Cooper's Beer from Australia, which was the first time I'd seen that after coming back from study abroad in the U.S. And, so, I was really fascinated with this portfolio of beers and the position was going to be



essentially a new sales position, selling beer for them in the West Village of Manhattan. And Union, when they acquired this portfolio, were technically competing against Anheuser Busch in Manhattan, although they were the Anheuser Busch distributor in Brooklyn. So, it was a really interesting time to be selling beer in New York City. It was definitely, in retrospect, a time of immense transition from mostly light lagers on tap at most of, kind of the tap houses to a time of a lot of pale ales and IPAs and, it was a time when, I remember in the first year or so, and, my parents probably thought I was crazy to leave this finance position to go and work for a beer distributor, but I just, I, I felt like it would be so much more enjoyable and fulfilling and, it certainly had plenty of challenges. But it was. It was exciting and, and fulfilling. And it was really neat to be able to work with a lot of these, at the time, very small brewers, like Allagash. Rob Tod would come to New York City, and he'd go out in the street and meet with customers with us, and, and it was really cool to be able to learn from, from guys like him when at the time I think Allagash was about a five-thousand barrel a year brewery. And, Carol Stoudt from Stoudt's and Bill Covaleski from Victory. And a number of other we got to meet. Steve Dressler from Sierra Nevada. So folks who are really kind of, you know, pioneers and, you know, legends in, in our industry back really before they, they were what they are today. So, yeah. And, I'd, I'd say in New York, it was neat to be selling beer from, you know, restaurant to restaurant, or store to store. Early on we'd sell both to little tiny bodegas, which could only fit a couple of cases of beer in the coolers to the fanciest restaurants in New York City. And, it was neat seeing the transition from around 2004, 2005, a lot of the fanciest white tablecloth restaurants in New York, which would kind of look scornfully upon beer and say, "No, we're, we're not a beer place. We're, can't you see, we're this very nice restaurant. We sell wine here." And, to restauranteurs like Danny Meyer and Tom Colicchio and starting to shift the, the perception of beer where they were putting beer front and center and making it a, a feature on their menu. And they were building these exceptional beer lists that were prominently featured right on the printed menu, where it used to be that at these, you know, many of the nice restaurants, you had to ask the server if they even carried beer and if they did, which ones. So, it was an explosive period of growth for craft beer in New York, and I think, the rest of the country. But it was neat to see first-hand how things were, were really starting to shift toward an appreciation for unique, interesting, flavorful beer from all over the world.

00:29:31 McCulla: Can I ask, how did the, the pitch differ if you were talking to a bodega versus Danny Meyer?

McKay: It, so, again, early on we were both on and off premise sales reps, and, and that structure did change eventually. But with, I loved the pitches with restauranteurs. We did a lot of staff training and, and that took a lot of preparation. And, you'd often try to bring in a representative from the brewery or the owner of the brewery to help with some of these tastings. We'd bring in a range of beers and, you know, get them chilled down and sample them in challenges. And with a bodega owner, their challenge was, do they have enough

storage space to, to store the beer and can they order enough beer to meet the delivery minimum, so you're more just trying to discuss the, the price point of the beer and is there some way to get them a, a dollar off each case if they order five cases of a certain beer. They're much more interested in how much space is it gonna take up, how much does it cost, and will it sell? And, convincing a lot of these bodega owners that craft beer has the potential to sell was a big hurdle. And, a couple years into getting them to realize that brands like Sierra Nevada and Allagash had the potential to sell. Then we had to try to convince them that people might actually like craft beer in cans as well when Oskar Blues came to the east coast and I think we were the first east coast distributor for quite a few breweries. Green Flash. Oskar Blues. I think when BrewDog came to the U.S. we were their first distributor. And, when Sixpoint opened up in Brooklyn, we were their only distributor. So, it was neat working with a lot of these, these companies when they were kind of taking their first foray into the east coast or into New York.

McCulla: Great.

00:31:37 Murtagh: [Unintelligible] was probably the best [unintelligible] experience, I mean, have a chance to go back to school, study different things. But yet, getting to know, work with some of these luminaries in our minds in the beer industry was, was an amazing learning experience.

McKay: Mr. Kiuti from Japan, when he came to the U.S., he'd come to New York and work with us in, in Union Beer. And Gaylord Schneider VI came over and spent some time working with us in the market and meeting some customers. Matthias Trum from Brauerei Heller-Trum in Bamberg, Germany, where Patrick actually got to apprentice, came over and we put on some really fun events and it was, it was a different time back then, but a really, a fun time.

00:32:29 McCulla: Alright. And so, and so Hardywood Park, when did that begin and how?

Murtagh: It was October 2011, so, shortly after I got back from brewing school we had finished up our financing, what we hoped would be enough money to get the brewery off the ground and, and get it running. So, yeah, in the, I moved to Richmond where Eric was living in March 2011. And, we opened our doors in October 2011. We had looked at a number of different warehouses, and we found a lot of places with a lot of charm, you know, these old brick buildings, and finally we found one place that, you know, wasn't the prettiest building, it was a, was a warehouse. It had good parking. It had a separate space for an office and bathroom and a little taproom bar. And at the time, it was illegal to sell glasses of beer in your taproom without having a restaurant attached to it. So, we were only giving away samples and sell beer to go. And, so we didn't need much of a taproom. And then, it had a big ten-thousand square foot back warehouse that, you know, we thought, just add a few floor drains and upgrade the electricity a little bit, and we'll be good to go. And then we-.

00:33:55 McKay: We'd raised about 1.2 million dollars to start from ten investors, and, we, it took us a long time to, to get through the fundraising process. I think our original idea for a brewery, first one we ever pitched to investors, was to, to buy a farmhouse winery in Litchfield, Connecticut, which sat up on this hill, and we were gonna convert it into a farmhouse brewery. And, nobody thought there was any potential for a farmhouse brewery to survive. There weren't any really at the time. And, now I'm looking back at breweries like Hill Farmstead and Tree House when it first started, and, Kent Falls Brewing up in, in Kent, not far from where we were homebrewing, that are all having tremendous successes. It seems like it probably could have, could have worked out okay. But, but, you know, the kind of, you know, initial rejection of our proposal to, to any potential investor we could get a meeting with forced us to, to get comfortable in our positions working in beer sales, and both of us earn promotions into management positions. And I sort of shifted over to the marketing side of things, and during that time, got to create some interesting website, greatbrewers.com, and a mobile app called Beer Cloud. And, which was interesting exposure into another side of things. And, get a lot of beer education for our sales team members around the country. And, put forward the sister-owned program, we visited, so we're trying to create beer education programs from scratch, which I did along with Stan [unknown] from Civilization of Beer. And, and in that process, during that process, the Sheehan Family Companies who, who we work for, purchased Specialty Beverage in Richmond. And, we, we started to reapproach our business plan from a more pragmatic perspective, and to look carefully at how other successful breweries have built their companies, and, and to, to look carefully at demographics. And Richmond really fit the demographic. Culturally it was fairly similar to a city like Portland, Oregon, which it has, it had an amazing culinary scene with I think it was the second highest number of independent restaurants per capita. It had a, a big adventure sports scene with the James River and it's classical rapids running right through town provided a playground for kayakers and mountain bikers and, and, you know, an indication that, that there were people that were open to adventure and trying new things. Lots of small coffee shops. And the only thing missing was really the breweries. There were really two breweries in the region with Extra Billys and Legend. And only one in the city, Legend, which was more of a brewpub and we had built this model to be more similar to breweries like Allagash, which started as a production brewery only, without any taproom, and that was really what we were trying to accomplish. And so, our goal was to take this 1.2 million dollars and stretch it to become a profitable production brewery. And, our first bid back from our contractor after we signed that five-year lease was about a-

Murtagh: It was close to a million dollars.

McKay: One and a half, it was over, over.

Murtagh: Was it over a million?

00:37:55 McKay: It was over a million dollars to, just to build that space. And we'd already paid about five or six hundred thousand for, for the equipment. And, so we were on paper out of money before we even got our doors open. So, we had to, essentially, slashed the construction budget down to the absolute bare basics. And, teach ourselves how to do things like tile floors and apply epoxy floor coatings and hook up lightbulb lines, and fortunately we found some very talented people, one, Brian Nelson, our head brewer from day one, who was an engineer and really helped a lot with getting that brewery built and up and running. And starting to brew some exceptional beer.

Murtagh: Yeah, the company we bought the brewhouse from [unintelligible] companies that could set this brewhouse up was a lot mo-, more than we could afford. So, yeah, Brian pretty much set the whole thing up. I think, [unintelligible], he got the furniture set up by himself.

McKay: With one arm. I think he had a broken arm at the time.

Murtagh: So, it's amazing how resourceful you can be when you, when you need to be.

00:39:14 McKay: But, Brian had commercial brewing experience. And was a very talented homebrewer. And, and so for quite a while, it was just the three of us brewing. We worked around the clock that first year. I did not see much of Rebecca and Francie, my wife and daughter, because we were just working all the time, seven days a week. And, we legally had the right to sell growlers. And I think we just kinda did that on a fairly sporadic basis. And it wasn't a very lucrative venture. And, I remember in that first year, starting to get into brewing with local ingredients and we were at capacity right out of the gates. We had signed the distribution agreement with Brown Distributing in town, and they were excited to have another local brewery in their portfolio, and we were starting out with only one year-round beer, a Belgian blonde ale which so many people were questioning at the time, but we felt like after years of selling beer in New York City, with a huge percentage of those American craft brands making pale ales and IPAs, that maybe we should try something different. And so, we created Hardywood Singel which was patterned after the table beers of some of the monastic breweries in Belgium.

00:40:51 Murtagh: Westvleteren was probably the, probably the most similar to what that recipe was patterned after, but, we had talked about this beer being a Belgian blonde ale, but the flavors of a Belgian blonde, a lot of them we tried were, you know, a little on the sweeter side, hard to drink more than one of. As a flagship beer, we wanted people to be able to have a couple in one sitting. And, I remember when I was in brewing school in Germany, we took a little side trip down to Westvleteren. We had to call, call their hotline and order their beer at the time, which I think was Westvleteren 10. So, I ordered a case when we went down there, and we came out and checked your name off the list, put the case in

your trunk. And then we went in a cafe and, and tried their table beer that no one really talked about. And it was kind of exactly what Erik and I had talked about this beer tasting like. It was a little hoppier and a little drier. But still a lot of that Belgian yeast character to it. And that's, that's really what it was modeled after, it was our first flagship beer.

00:42:00 McCulla: How did consumers respond to that?

Murtagh: They liked it. I, they, they really liked it. It was unique. It was really drinkable, great food pairing beer. And it's funny. I, when I met my wife, she, she had told me that Singel was on this, it came out right around the time she graduated college, and so for when she started drinking beer, she said that had this nostalgic flavor to her. It was funny, because it was far from my first craft beer, but I think it has just, yeah, this unique flavor. So, if it was one of the first beers you had it definitely stands out.

McKay: We didn't know of any other production breweries or commercial breweries at the time that was making a Belgian blonde ale as its flagship beer, or even as a year-round beer. And, so it was totally unique to what everyone else had experienced. And it became embraced pretty quickly. A lot of people didn't know how to pronounce it. They'd be saying yale since we spell it with an "el". Singel is another interpretation. But, we just called it Singel and yeah, it really took off in Richmond.

00:43:16 McCulla: And how, how have the beers you brew evolved over time? And alongside that, how would you, how would you describe the Hardywood Park brand? How are you different from other breweries?

Murtagh: Well, I guess, as Eric said, we wanted to be very complimentary to the other stuff that's out there. And, so, our next flagship beer was Hardywood Pils, and one of our brewers was really into brewing German styles. And, we love that style. And there weren't a ton of American made German style pilsners. And we had just taken on, Kate Lee had just joined us. She was our-, at the time our director of quality assurance, now our VP of Operations and Quality. But, it just gave us a lot more confidence in producing a lager with some lighter flavors that, I mean, sort of flaws would shine through and, she had developed this quality assurance program that just made us a lot more confident in putting out a lager. So, we set our brewer to work developing this German style pilsner. We kept trying them, and finally settled on, on one that we loved. We tried a bunch of different malts for that one, and settled on Weyermann's Pilsner Malt as the one that gave us really that authentic German flavor. All the German milled hops. So, that was our, our second flagship beer. And after that, we still had a lot of people saying, "You guys gotta do a flagship IPA." So, that's when we came out with VIPA. And, so, so that stands for, for Virginia pale ale. And, so we talked about incorporating some local ingredients because we had been using a lot of local ingredients in our reserve series, now our Virginia Roots Series. And, thought we

wanted to produce something that was an IPA but still unique enough to compliment the other IPAs that were out there. We wanted to produce this beer that was really conducive to the hop climate of Virginia but also be a great beer the winter. And incorporate some local ingredients. So, we decided we wanted to use some local malts. There was Copper Fox Distillery was malting grain so we talked to them, were able to get some floor malted pale malt from them. And, and some hops from a couple local hop farms. And, this was before the big [unintelligible] IPA craze, but we wanted to do something that was I guess a little fruitier, herby but just super refreshing. And, so, came out with VIPA.

00:46:16 McKay: Going back, our very first beer we brewed only days before Singel was on our twenty-gallon pilot brewing system was RVA IPA, which was a wet hop beer that we brewed with hops grown in people's back yards. And that kinda gave rise to this community hopping project we have where we give out hop rhizomes every year. And we posted about it on social media and shortly after that, brewed our second seasonal beer, Farmhouse Pumpkin, which we're actually bottling today. That was made with local sugar pie pumpkins. And people seemed to really resonate and to respond very favorably to our use of local ingredients and fresh ingredients. And we made a video of us cutting up and, and roasting the pumpkins. And a few days later had a random visitor at the brewery, gentleman named Bill Cox who showed up with stalks of baby white ginger, which we didn't know what they were at the time. It looked like sugar cane or something. But, there's this, this farmer who was knocking on the door and we were again working like crazy and didn't have a lot of time for cold calls, but he just seemed like he was so excited about what he was carrying that we just had to take the time to see what he had to say. And he brought in these stalks of ginger and cut them up and I think within minutes we realized that he was as passionate about this product that he had worked so hard to create as, as we were about beer and creating unique beers. And he was asking, he stated, his son had sent him the video of us using local pumpkins and wanted to know if we wanted to use local ginger to make a ginger ale or something along those lines. And, and we certainly, you know, it got us thinking about how do we make a beer with this local ginger. You know, in collaboration with this farmer who's just so passionate about his product. And, a couple days later met Hannah, the now wife of Cy Barrow of Barrow Farms who's an, a beekeeper who has a phenomenal product of wildflower honey, from Barrow Farms, that she shared the same level of excitement and enthusiasm for this locally made honey. And, I think as Patrick and I were preparing to, with Ryan, to make a, a vanilla stout, which was an old homebrew recipe that people seemed to really love, as our winter seasonal, it sort of clicked that, you know, what if we took the ginger and some honey and added some cinnamon and vanilla and ultimately tried to create a gingerbread stout. And so, I called Patrick up on my way into work, and shared my idea with him and he said, "Yeah, let's, let's look into it and, and go for it." And so, we started doing some research and found pretty quickly that there had never been a commercially brewed gingerbread stout. But that we wanted to try and go for it. And so, instead of patterning it after another existing beer, we sort of were building this recipe from the ground up

using Casselmonte Farm ginger and Barrow Farms honey and vanilla and cinnamon and, and ultimately created what we're probably best known for today, which is our gingerbread stout. But the first release of this beer again was before you could legally have taproom sales, we had about six folks show up and I remember one gentleman in particular who had been a little critical about us referring to our Farmhouse Pumpkin as being made with a Saison yeast. 'Cause he argued that saison's a typically much lower alcohol. And he snubbed the gingerbread stout and took a sip and this smile just lit over his face and he turned and said, "It's like Christmas in a glass." And, long story short, that beer earned a bronze medal at the World Beer Cup the following March in 2012. And received a one hundred rating by Jason and Todd Alstrom in BeerAdvocate magazine. And last year it was rated as the number one holiday beer on earth by Beer Connoisseur magazine. So, it's developed an incredible cult following over the last seven years. And that's really helped to shape our approach to brewing with local ingredients in what Patrick is proud of, is the Virginia Roots Series. Series of seasonal beers that try to showcase the terroir of central Virginia with ingredients like raspberries and blackberries and pumpkins and locally roasted coffee. And I think that's really helped to define and differentiate Hardywood as a brewery with, with our use of such a extensive amount of local ingredients which this year should exceed fifty thousand pounds of locally grown, Virginia grown, ingredients.

00:51:49 McCulla: And related to this, and perhaps from a broader perspective, what, what would you say beer consumers want now? And, where do you see it going in the future?

Murtagh: I think there are a lot of different trends going on. You know, in IPAs have been popular over the last couple years. I think early on when we were selling beer in New York, the craze was really bitter IPAs, the higher IBU the better. And, I think in addition to New England IPAs, people were looking for more approachable, sessionable beers. Lagers have become more popular again. But, I think there, I think these trends go in waves as breweries start to make more approachable, lighter lagers. People might eventually get sick of those and go back to wanting a bitter IPA [unintelligible], so, I mean, who knows what the future will bring. But, yeah, right now you're seeing people generally moving towards more approachable beers where its not necessarily gonna shock the senses. But, you can enjoy the, the fine nuances of the, the beer itself.

00:53:05 McCulla: To what extent would you say that social media plays a role in either how you feel you communicate with consumers, or, or hear of, hear their opinions?

McKay: It's hugely influential. And it's, it's certainly the way that we tell our, the story of Hardywood, and the beers that we make.

Murtagh: Yeah, I mean, back in the day, the, the small companies, whether it was a small brewery, whatever else, they didn't have, really have a voice until , I'll say, before TV commercials or radio commercials, newspaper ads. But, now we just have this method of directly communicating with our consumers [unintelligible] with, to, to find those people that, that are interested in what we do.

McKay: Engaging in really conversations with a consumer base and with your audience is a hugely powerful aspect of social media and helps you tell those authentic stories that back in the day used to have to tell one person at a time at different restaurants in New York. You can now convey those stories in a, a photograph on Instagram.

00:54:17 McCulla: I have a, starting to wrap up, a few kind of bigger picture questions. The craft beer scene at the moment, it's, it's grown rapidly in recent years, and has expanded in many different ways. We're sitting in a beautiful, new, somewhat new brewery, which if you could describe it for the benefit of the, the recording that would be great. But, I would love to just hear your strategy related to, to growth in a very competitive time.

Murtagh: When we opened, there were a thousand breweries in the U.S., and about thirty-five or forty in Virginia. Now there are six thousand breweries plus in the U.S., and about, about two-hundred-and-fifty in Virginia. Again, only one other-, really one in the city of Richmond at the time that we opened. And about thirty-five now in the Richmond region. So, it's become an extremely competitive time. For us at Hardywood, we've done our best to cater to shifting consumer demands by having a research and development brewery that we opened in February of 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia. That's a three and a half barrel brewhouse that we brew on at least a couple times a week. Often testing new recipes. And then we use our original production facility on Ownby Lane in Richmond to sort of scale those, those recipes up to a, a level that we can do a can release or sort of a small batch, medium batch draft release. And then our facility that we're in now is a 820 Sanctuary Trail Drive in Goochland County, Virginia in the West Creek Business Park, sits up on a bluff that overlooks Tuckahoe Creek, and the Tuckahoe Creek watershed. Which is a tributary to the James River. We've left many acres, it's a twenty-four-acre property altogether and we've left many acres of forest around us. The building itself is fifty-five thousand square feet, with pine ceilings throughout, these grand, high ceilings with, you experience being sort of walking up from the parking lot to this, this large cedar-sided building that kind of resembles a barn or, or farmhouse, walking through grand, oak doors that were made from trees on the property. And then opening into a facility where you can see everything that's going on in the production side of things with the brewhouse, sixty-barrel [unintelligible] brewhouse, with glass windows behind it where you can see through to the forest. And in a straight line set up so you can sort of understand how wort is produced. And panning to the right, we have a stage right in front of the brewhouse and then the fermenting



tanks, the forty-foot tall, three-hundred-and-sixty-barrel fermenters kind of towering in the rear of the fermentation cellar. And then our taproom bar kind of a centerpiece in kind of a, a architect created silo that kind of resembles a farm silo. And then you walk through the back doors and you can look out over the Tuckahoe Creek watershed, and down the hill where we're planning to build-, there's sort of a natural amphitheater that exists where we're planning to build a stage, hopefully this winter, for live outdoor music next summer. So, this is a space that we hope will attract visitors from far and wide to discover our beer and have unique experiences where they're engaging our beer. Our hope is that that will lead to brand loyalty. We can make beer here more efficiently, and we think that's an important step to remaining competitive in the market. And we can make enough beer to become what we hope is a thriving regional brewery with the vast majority of our beer made and sold within Virginia. We're the maybe fourth or fifth largest craft brewery in Virginia right now, with Starr Hill being the largest independent craft brewery. Port City being the second. I think we're probably the third. We brewed just under fifteen-thousand barrels last year. And this year we'll come close to twenty-thousand barrels. And, I think our attitude right now is that we want to focus on building really strong relationships with our customers, which includes distributors, retailers, and, and consumers. And we want to focus on Virginia. And, and, again, bringing people into our taprooms to have unique and interesting experiences. Continuing to brew interesting, unique, different beers to appeal to those people that are looking for something that's always new, but also to have accessible, approachable beers on the, on the shelf at grocery stores. We're about a year into making our Richmond Lager, which is a only, initially, only available in certain vintage style, stubby twelve-ounce bottles, with a label designed by Ross Trimmer of Sure Hand Signs that kind of depicts the James River running through, running over the train bridge in downtown Richmond. And, our hope is that that brand will continue to, to grow. It's been selling at a fantastic rate at grocery stores, and we're starting to sell at more convenience stores and I think a large part of our strategy is to focus on growing sales of Richmond Lager. Right now it's only available in Richmond and Northern Virginia, but we hope to make that available statewide by sometime next spring.

01:00:47 McCulla: Alright. Two final questions to end on. The, the first of these is about this term craft. Do you feel that craft is a useful term in the brewing industry today? Does it describe what you do?

McKay: Yeah, I think it definitely does. I mean, when it was described it was, I mean when it was first coined I guess, it was meant to describe a craft just like any other. Just something you, very physical, and well thought out, the people doing it are passionate about it in that they would probably be doing it whether they were making a living out of it or not. So, yeah, I think craft is a great word whether it'll stick around for a while or not. I don't know.

Murtagh: Biggest challenge with that word is how the industry's evolved with a lot of much larger brewers buying up craft brewers, and continuing to use that

terminology. And, I know the Brewer's Association's effort has been to shift focus from craft as a word, which is, you know, at the end of the day the breweries that have been acquired are making a lot of the same beer, but independent I think becoming a more important sort of key, key phrase. When we started in the industry, microbreweries was still a common term, but you don't really hear people use that anymore. I think it's, you know, we've seen craft really rise as a main linguistic, you know, reference to really what the Brewer's Association defines as small, independent and traditional. And I think independent will really start to become, seems to already be starting to become the, the key differentiator between the mega breweries and the smaller, privately owned breweries.

01:02:44 McCulla: Right. Makes sense. Alright, final question. It's a big one. But, considering your, your long careers in the brewing industry, what would you say you value most about what you do?

McKay: I think, I think for me it's just the concept that for a living you can just create something. It, it's kind of, it's kind of like making a living being an artist that you can create something and then sell it. And, and then see people enjoy it. Or not enjoy it. It would be a big letdown if you make something that people don't like. Like, when you finally hit on something and create something and people love it, that's really exciting. And I think that's why a lot of people get into this industry. And then most of our brewers, we give them a lot of creative freedom to create some of their recipes and I think it's, it's a lot of fun having people work here. Again, with doing the same thing in brewing, whether they were brewing at commercial scale or brewing in their backyard.

Murtagh: At Hardywood, our motto is brew with purpose. And for me, it's really exciting being in an industry where you're creating something that brings people together. Beer has been bringing people together for centuries. And to also be able to make a difference. And, for us at Hardywood, that revolves around environmental stewardship and sourcing ingredients locally and building community and, I think it's extremely rewarding being able to see that difference made through the hard work and dedication of our team. While also making something that's pretty delicious.

McCulla: Excellent. Alright, well thank you both so much for your time.

McKay: Thank you.