

THE CHICAGO EGYPTIAN

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FERMENTATION INSTITUTE PUTS SIU 'ON CUTTING EDGE'

As Chicago experiences a rapid growth in the craft beer sector, opportunities for study and interdisciplinary research in fermentation science are on tap at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education last summer gave its initial approval for the creation of the Fermentation Science Institute at the university. The institute serves as an umbrella for the support and development of educational, research and outreach programs related to fermentation processes and products.

Sitting amid the dust created by construction of the institute's offices and teaching and testing labs at the McLafferty Annex Collaborative Research Facility on the west side of campus, Director Matt McCarroll envisions robust programs that will create new career options for students, enhance collaborative research efforts and serve regional fermentation-related businesses. The planned degree program (B.S. in Fermentation Science) will provide students with a solid scientific background and specialized knowledge in the area of brewing science. The colleges of science and agricultural sciences are partners in the institute, and faculty from those colleges, as well as the College of Engineering and the School of Medicine, also will be involved.

Among his goals are the creation of a fermentation specialization for chemistry majors and the recruitment of students for a fermentation science bachelor's degree program in fall 2015.

"We will be able to offer a real brick-and-mortar, hands-on experience that will tie into our very strong core science curricula," McCarroll, a professor of chemistry and biochemistry, says. "This will help us attract students and equip them to do really well in the fermentation science field. In my conversations with employers, they want really well-trained brewing scientists. In some cases, they are more interested in



Matt McCarroll

the solid science background than the brewing experience."

This is occurring at a time that the craft beer sector is growing in the Midwest. McCarroll points out that the East Coast and West Coast markets were responsible for the microbrew revolution in the 1980s and 1990s. He says, with a few notable exceptions, that the vast majority of early and successful micro and craft breweries were located in the Pacific Northwest and northern California.

But Midwest markets, including the southern Illinois region and Chicago, which is the third-largest craft beer market nationally, have begun to realize their potential in the industry.

"Craft brewing and distilling have grown leaps and bounds in Chicago. The potential is clear," McCarroll says. "During the past decade or so there has been an explosion of Midwestern craft breweries that have not only help drive the evolution of craft beer nationally, but are doing so with distinctive styles and approaches."

According to the Brewers Association, the nonprofit trade association that represents the majority of the nation's 3,040

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Hailstorm Brewery: A 'Whirlwind' for SIU Alumnus

Brandon Banbury has memories of his grandfather and father growing, harvesting and fermenting grapes. But he never envisioned himself owning a brewery. Banbury didn't even think about the concept until after his graduation from SIU.

The 2008 mechanical engineering alumnus joined a homebrewing club – Brewers of South Suburbia (BOSS) – and met Chris Schiller. Unbeknownst to each other, Banbury and Schiller both had plans to develop and open a

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'Unique Skills' are an Asset for Frankfort Spirits

A distillery business wouldn't figure to be along the career path for a senior graphic designer. But as partners in Frankfort Spirits were searching for an individual to round out their team, a person with these skills was the perfect fit.

Chris McFarland (*The Chicago Egyptian*, May 2013) was approached by good friend Jack King, whom he had known since third grade. King, and his friends who were partnering in the venture – brothers Phil and Dan Casey

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Frankfort Spirits continued.

– decided that McFarland would be a nice complement to their respective abilities. King convinced the Caseys by sharing a video showcasing a Duvel beer glass design competition that McFarland won in 2012.

“Jack, Phil and Dan felt that I was the missing link they needed in this quest,” McFarland says. “Phil and Dan had been home brewing for more than 20 years, and their knowledge of spirits was impressive. So I was excited to partner with them.

“I brought my unique set of skills to the table to help develop the Frankfort Spirits brand, packaging and marketing materials. The ability to share my work through YouTube and social media has led me to the distilling business and other opportunities.”

McFarland says the diverse skill set among the partners has been an asset for Frankfort Spirits. King’s business sense, knowledge of client outreach and technology, with Phil Casey’s legal background and Dan Casey’s expertise in manufacturing and production, complement McFarland’s graphic design and branding skills.



“Each partner brings diverse expertise to the table, but we share a common love for quality spirits,” McFarland says.

The 1992 communication design alumnus developed the distillery’s diamond corporate logo. He received initial inspiration for the design while growing up in Frankfort and visiting the historical society.

“Decorative bricks used for the downtown sidewalks in Frankfort provided insight. Some were floral

while others were geometric in style,” he says. “I was able to manipulate the Celtic design and add a ‘FS’ to truly make the logo our own.”

Frankfort Spirits launched Oct. 5, 2014, with the 15th distillery license in the history of Illinois. The number of Illinois distilleries continues to rise, which parallels increased interest in the fermenting business as whole, according to McFarland.

“We are happy to see so many people share our passion for craft distilled spirits,” he says. “It is particularly interesting to be involved in the whiskey boom. It is hard to gauge this phenomenon, since you have to wait so long to age a fine whiskey. But we expect the growth of whiskey interest to continue.”

Frankfort Spirits’ flagship product is Emil Stimple Straight Bourbon, which has a balance of flavors. The distillery also offers Verdict Vodka, made from 100 percent Illinois corn giving it a slight sweet taste. Frankfort Spirits has also developed a



Pictured left to right are: Curtis Newsom, Chris McFarland, Jack King, Phil Casey (bottom row), and Dan Casey and Dean Vaundry (top row).

couple of new products to expand its bourbon portfolio.

Additionally, Frankfort is aging its Ringneck Rye Whiskey and will release Bigfoot Wintermint Schnapps this fall. McFarland has already been honored for his graphics work with the new products.

“I submitted packaging for our Emil Stimple, Verdict Vodka and Bigfoot Schnapps to Graphic Design USA. Frankfort Spirits won an award for best package design,” McFarland says. “My team is proud of how the packaging turned out and pleased that it is being recognized by the design community.”

The distillery is located at The Loft at CD&ME on Lagrange Road. The venue owners offer fundraisers, weddings and a summer concert series, in addition to a comedy series during the winter. Frankfort Spirits is located on the second floor, and its tasting room at Frankfort Spirit also offers unique features.

Wide doors open up over its main seating area, and the partners created a front porch that resembles a look that McFarland likens to old distilleries in the Kentucky back hills. A sliding wood door in the room was built from wood in a 1800s Will County barn, and the façade was created with reclaimed weathered cedar.

“Our guests gather and taste our spirits near a 10-foot cedar and glass tasting table that rests on two old whiskey barrels,” he says.

McFarland, who continues his work as senior graphic designer for CommScope in Joliet and teaches a graphics course at Moraine Valley Community College, is excited about his newest venture.

“I was intrigued by the distillery business. In particular, I really enjoy fine whiskey and bourbon, in addition to creating cocktails and developing new recipes,” he says. “I find the process of taking grains and creating a premium spirit extremely interesting, and the outcome is quite enjoyable. I personally host most of the tastings on Sundays, and it is a lot of fun seeing our guests enjoy our products for the first time.”

Learn more at: frankfortspirits.com.