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For Immediate Release

PARTNERS IN LOVE AND BUSINESS

How a Married Couple, One a Tea Professional and the Other a Brewer, Work Together to Advance Their Businesses.

New Port Richey, Florida - Kelly and Bryan Hackman are going on more than a decade of marriage, but this year marks an important anniversary. 2021 is the fifth year of the couple's business partnership.

These two New Port Richey natives grew up in the same town, went to neighboring high schools, and graduated within a year of one another, yet it wasn't until their mid-thirties that their paths finally crossed. "We have been best friends since we met, and we fell in love very quickly," Kelly recalls. "I told Bryan I was only marrying once so I had to get it right. I knew right away that he and I had something special that we could build on."

The couple married in November 2010 and their journey has been whirlwind since.

Relationship, Partnership, Entrepreneurship

After getting married in 2010, the couple found various ways to support their hometown. For several years, Kelly worked as the Executive Director of New Port Richey's biggest event, Chasco Fiesta. "I absolutely loved being a part of that event, bringing people in from all over who have never been to our City," Kelly says. Bryan was right by her side volunteering to help when he wasn't at his full-time job in Tampa.

In 2016, with a desire in their hearts to do more for their community, they took the ultimate step and became business owners. They opened The White Heron Tea & Gifts – an award-winning destination for upscale tea service and blends. Kelly had a desire to create a beautiful destination in downtown New Port Richey that would highlight the best of the town and draw guests in to enjoy the quaintness and beauty the town offers. She wanted to provide the best business she could, so she studied tea through the World Tea Academy, Tea Mastermind, and by befriending some of the tea industries top professionals.

“Understanding your business and your offerings is so important,” Kelly states. “Whatever I was going to do, I wanted to dive into it and learn so that my place could become a complete destination.” The business took off and before long it expanded to triple the capacity.

While some may have been satisfied with this success, the ambitious couple was ready for their next venture.

A Second Venture

In 2018, the Cotee River Brewing Co. came to life on Main Street. New Port Richey’s first craft beer brewery, Cotee River Brewing was instantly recognized for their creativity and skill with a slew of awards in their first year.

“We spent so much time planning and building The White Heron that I decided Bryan could also have a business,” Kelly jokes, “Bryan kept telling me he wanted to be downtown and ‘play’ with us since we always seem to be having so much fun.”

It has been a lot of fun coupled by a lot of work. Bryan has been a craft beer aficionado for decades and it was the perfect fit for him to open up a place of his own that focused on what he enjoyed. A homebrewer for several years, it wasn’t until he was watching a City Council meeting at home, where the council was discussing the changing town. A member of the Council mentioned that with all of the changes, all that was needed was a brewery. “It was in that moment that Cotee River Brewing was born,” Bryan recalls. “I remember looking over at Kelly and saying, ‘there’s our sign, let’s do it’.”

Cotee River Brewing Company opened in late summer 2018 and has been a hit with locals and travelers alike. “We really work hard to keep our craft local and create unique offerings that appeal to a wide range of guests,” Bryan says. “Using local and natural has always been very important to us. You can see that in our beers, and in our local collaborations.

Collaboration is Key

No doubt that humor is a key ingredient in a successful partnership, but this couple shares more than one ingredient. Identifying the unconventional intersection between tea and craft beer has been the key to some of their top selling beers at Cotee River Brewing.

Cotee River Brewing Company has a great selection of core beers that they brew, including IPA’s, Pale Ales, Reds, Porters, Stouts, and Blondes. But it’s the collaboration beers that get the most attention.

“We had always heard about using flavors in beer and one day Kelly asked me, why don’t we use tea?” Bryan says. “I know it has been done before with certain beers but what if we could make some really unique beers using tea’s unique qualities, then that would set us apart from other brewers in the area and give guests some really fun beers to try in addition to our traditional ones.”

In fact, the first beer commercially brewed in the City of New Port Richey, by Cotee River Brewing Company, was their Market Fresh Wheat Ale. This light wheat ale boasts fruit and savory flavors one might find at a farmer’s market. And yes, it was brewed with tea. The herbal tea for this beer, provided by The White Heron’s tea brand, Driftwood Tea Company, is introduced during the boil process, and extracts many unique flavors. “It is a great, light beer,” Bryan says. “And because it was our first, many of our guests enjoy it and say it’s their favorite.”

Market Fresh was the first of several beer and tea collaborations that the couple has worked on over the past two years. Each time they introduce a new collaboration that beer tends to become a mainstay on their tap list. “It’s great working together,” states Bryan. “Kelly has such a love of flavors and creating pairings that developing beer using tea as the flavoring agent has been right up her alley, and what she loves to do. She’s always coming up with great ideas and I just can’t brew beer fast enough,” Bryan jokes.

Other beers that the pair have worked on in collaboration include: Sarazen Wheat Ale, using a strawberry and kiwi herbal tea; NPR Engine 1 Smoked Porter (named for the town’s fire department) using Lapsang Souchong to create that smoky flavor; and the Red Headed Blonde which highlights a hibiscus berry flavor from an herbal tea. “We use the tea as a natural way of introducing flavors without using artificial flavorings that leave harsh aftertastes in the beer,” says Bryan.

Last Valentine’s Day marked the release of their hit collaboration, the Chocolate Covered Strawberry Porter. Brewed as a regular porter, the beer takes on the unique flavors of strawberry and chocolate when it is moved to cold crash in the cooler. This is when tea from The White Heron is cold steeped in the beer. The result is a delicious and frothy, semi-sweet porter with notes of strawberry and a creamy chocolate finish. “The porter is traditionally cocoa in flavor, so it was only natural to add chocolate and strawberry flavors to bring out that cocoa-ness, making it perfect for Valentine’s Day,” explains Bryan.

Keeping Business in Perspective

If their first two ventures weren’t enough to stay occupied, the couple is taking on a new project together. The Coastline Salt Room will be the first of its kind in West Pasco. Located on Main Street, this facility will offer relaxing salt therapy sessions, and a space for yoga and meditation classes while enjoying salt therapy. With so many businesses they’re juggling, Bryan and Kelly will undoubtedly take advantage of their latest.

In anticipation of opening, the couple travelled to St. Petersburg, St. Augustine, and Knoxville to experience different salt rooms. Even on vacation, Bryan and Kelly are constantly evaluating the successful elements of downtowns and bringing ideas back to NPR. When you own a tea room, a salt room and a brewery, there are lots of opportunities to mix business, travel, and pleasure.

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Photos of Kelly, Bryan, The White Heron Tea & Gifts, and Cotee River Brewing Company are available upon request

About Kelly Hackman

Kelly Hackman, owner of The White Heron Tea & Gifts in New Port Richey, Florida, is a WTA Certified Tea Sommelier, Tea Specialist, and Etiquette Consultant. Hackman has created a unique tea escape at her tearoom, which has assisted in transforming her town's historic landscape and assists in drawing guests to the area from throughout the Southeastern United States.

About Bryan Hackman

Bryan Hackman is the owner of Cotee River Brewing Company, the first local brewery in the City of New Port Richey. He has been a home brewer and craft beer aficionado for many years and was excited to open a brewery in his hometown. By day, Bryan has been an electrical designer at an engineering firm in Tampa, Florida for 24 years. To this day, he continues working each day in Tampa and each night at his brewery.