



Allie Hochman

Starr Hill Brewery

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Allie Hochman: Can I just talk in a normal voice?

Sarah Rodriguez: Absolutely.

Allie Hochman: Great.

Sarah Rodriguez: It'll be able to pick it up—

Allie Hochman: Cool—

Sarah Rodriguez: —totally fine. So this is Sarah Rodriguez with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is March 10th, 2023. I'm here at Starr Hill in Richmond, Virginia. If you can introduce yourself for the recorder.

Allie Hochman: Awesome. My name is Allie Hochman, and I am the general manager of the Starr Hill Beer Hall & Rooftop in Richmond, Virginia, in the Scott's Addition neighborhood.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. And could you tell me your birthday, for the record?

Allie Hochman: Yeah, it's September 6th, 1988.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. So, going back, where were you born? Tell me about your childhood. What was that like?

Allie Hochman: So I was born on Long Island in New York.

Sarah Rodriguez: Long Island.

Allie Hochman: Yes, and I grew up there. I lived in the same house until I went off to college, so, yeah, that was in Merrick, New York, so that's on the South Shore of Long Island.

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But basically grew up there with my mom and my dad and my sister, and had a pretty typical middle-class, white upbringing, I would say. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Allie Hochman: Very kind of not necessarily insulated, but Long Island is a very interesting place.

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

Allie Hochman: Yes. It's actually, I mean, just I'm learning about the history more as I grow up, and it's very—its history is very segregated. Looking back now, I can kind of see that there were definitely folks of different backgrounds in my elementary school and high school but literally just a couple individuals.

Sarah Rodriguez: So predominantly white?

Allie Hochman: Yes, definitely different religions, I would say. I mean, I had a lot of Christian friends of varying Christian faiths, and then a bunch of Jewish friends, but definitely white.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Tell me about your parents. What do they do?

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Allie Hochman: They are both in healthcare. My mom is a dietician, and my dad was the supervisor of a transplant immunology lab, so like dealing with donations, organ donation and stuff.

Sarah Rodriguez: Tell me a bit more about your childhood home, specifically as it relates to food.

Allie Hochman: Ooh. So, I mean, growing up, I definitely always had an interest in food. I loved to eat. I still love to eat. It's one of my favorite activities.

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. And I think my parents were always, I think, adventurous eaters and into food as well, which is probably where I got it from. I don't think I have a specific memory of this, but I remember being told that like even from a young age, I would eat things that maybe like little kids weren't always into. Like, my parents I think gave me sushi for the first time when I was 5 years old, and they instantly regretted it because then I always asked for it.

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And it's expensive and maybe not something you want to eat all the time. It's still one of my favorite foods. But definitely I would say when we would go out to eat or order to take out, it was all different kinds of cuisine, but my mom also cooked a lot growing up, and we had dinner together probably, I mean, almost every night of the week while I was growing up. And my mom cooked all different sorts of stuff, mostly like Italian American-ish, 'cause that's just really prevalent on Long Island, and it's really easy to make like spaghetti and jar sauce and whatever.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

Allie Hochman: But I would always help her. I like to watch her cook. I like to stir. And then eventually, she kind of taught me like, "Okay, this is how you chop things. This is how you follow a recipe."

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And I definitely was into watching a lot of the cooking shows on like PBS growing up, like Lidia and Mary Ann—I forget her last name—and stuff like that. So just always being interested in watching cooking shows, and so once like Food Network took off, and I don't even remember when they started that, but definitely growing up with cable, that was a channel I watched frequently, or watching *Top Chef* on Bravo was always interesting to me. So it was definitely part of my interests growing up. But I didn't really work in a kitchen or work in food until I was a teenager, when I worked at a pizzeria that was up the block from our house.

Sarah Rodriguez: What was that like?

Allie Hochman: It was awesome. I loved it. I mean, I feel almost like I grew up in that pizzeria because—so my parents always told me—well, I guess I should say the owner of that pizzeria when I was young, and I would come in with my parents, he would always say to me like, "Oh, I knew you before you were born!"

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Because when my parents moved into our house, it was in July of 1988, and I think on moving day, they walked up to the pizzeria 'cause it was two blocks away, got a pizza, and met everyone there. And then that was our local spot that we would always get food from, and so I knew the folks fairly well, just going in there all the time. And then they were hiring one summer, and I started working there, and basically worked behind the counter, just like warming up pizza for people. It's not really cooking but more like assembling salads, and then taking people's orders, and stuff like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. About how old were you?

Allie Hochman: When I started, I was 16, and I had my working papers, that sort of thing, that you have to have, I think, when you're working when you're like under 18 in New York, I guess, or maybe under 17. I can't remember. That was in the summer, right before I turned 17, I think.

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And then I continued working there, like, when I would come home from college as well.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where'd you end up going to college? Was it in the area?

Allie Hochman: No, University of Virginia, so that's what brought me down here.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, I see. What made you decide to go that far?

Allie Hochman: So, growing up, I always went to like summer camps, like day camps. And then, as I got older, I went to sleepaway camps, and I would be gone for the whole summer. So going far away was never a problem for me, and it was just kind of, you know, I wanted to experience college life and like the whole like college campus, and that sort of thing. And it was a place that my guidance counselor had suggested just because, you know, I remember when she suggested it that I kind of just was like, "Oh, I guess every state has a university of that state." But I remember just like, "Okay, whatever, I'll check it out." And I went to their website, and I remember looking at the website and being like, "Oh, this website doesn't suck."

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"It's not [Laughter] annoying to use. It's very easy to navigate. It has cool pictures on it." I don't know, it just looked different from other college websites, I guess. And I looked at the application, and some of the essays that they had were kind of fun and intriguing. I remember —

Sarah Rodriguez: Like the prompts?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. I remember one said, "Describe a piece of art that moved you," or something like that, and one of them was like, "Describe your favorite type of weather," or something like that, and a couple other interesting ones. And I was like, oh, I could do this application. It's more than just, "Tell us about a problem that you overcame and whatever." So I applied, and got in, and went to visit, and was impressed by the campus. Also, I remember when I took the tour with my mom when we went down there that the guide told us a lot about all the different like traditions that UVA has.

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Being a senior in high school, I was starting to kind of get that like nostalgic feeling like, oh, I'm already looking back, and I'm gonna miss this, and being really into school spirit at the time.

'Cause when I first started high school, I was definitely like a young, angry, like, "nobody understands me," kind of teenager. And as you sort of grow up, you're like, oh, we're all just the same, and it's actually like really fun here to be here with all my friends and these people that I've been with for the last four years. Like, I don't wanna let it go. But kind of continuing that at UVA with just how into the school everyone was, and I was like, I could buy into that. Like, I wanna be part of something. Yeah, I think that was it.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. What did you end up majoring in, studying there?

Allie Hochman: I majored in biology and Italian, and I minored in art history. And in hindsight, I'm kind of like should I have just like double-majored in Italian and art history, and done the bio minor, whatever?

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But definitely went in with that like science interest because my parents were in healthcare. Having that background, I always really enjoyed it in school as a subject. But then also wanting to continue my Italian language studies because, I mean, probably New York is one of the only places where Italian is offered in middle school through high school. So I started taking it when I was 13. They had like Italian, French and Spanish. And I was like, oh, French is too hard, and everybody takes Spanish. I wanna be different, and I like Italian food, so I'll take that. [Laughter] And I always knew going to college that I wanted to study abroad, and that I would want to go to Italy because I want to eat everything there. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: I don't blame you.

Allie Hochman: So I knew I wanted to major in that, just because I wanted to continue my language studies and study abroad, and biology just kind of worked out, and the classes were interesting, and I think I came in with some credit or something.

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Sarah Rodriguez: I grew up with a dad as a doctor, so I also started in bio, and then I took a women in Renaissance Italy history class.

Allie Hochman: Ooh, hell yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: After that, I was like I'm not taking any more science classes. [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: Can we pause for a second?

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, of course.

Allie Hochman: I need a tissue. My nose is like —

Sarah Rodriguez: We are back. So, during this time, maybe even before, did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up?

Allie Hochman: No. I mean, I had ideas. When I was young, I mean, in elementary school, I was very interested in being a chef or a food critic but mostly because I love to eat. And, I mean, I liked cooking too. But I think at the time, I was like fine with writing. Now, just having done it so much in college, I'm kind of like over it. But when I do write things, I'm kind of a perfectionist, and it slows down the process, so it's a little stressful for me.

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But I definitely have opinions on food, so I can be kind of critical. And when you're a kid, you don't really understand what goes into a real job. But I always, when I was young, I always dreamed of opening like a restaurant or a food court or something that had all my favorite foods in it. So I was like, okay, we're gonna have sushi. We're gonna have pasta. We're gonna have pizza. We're gonna have ice cream.

Sarah Rodriguez: Just so you could enjoy it? [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: Yeah, pretty much, I guess. I never really thought about running a space [Laughter] like that. And it's funny because now that I am in the food and beverage industry, I'm like, ooh, that would've been a lot but also would've been really weird but maybe also a little ahead of its time because I feel like food halls are kind of—I mean, there are places where

they've existed for a little while like around the country, but they're definitely popping up more and more.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure, very much ahead of your time.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. [Laughter]

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Sarah Rodriguez: So you get through college at UVA, and you decide to stick around in Virginia?

Allie Hochman: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Rodriguez: What were you doing right after that?

Allie Hochman: I don't think, honestly, I don't think I applied for any jobs after college 'cause I had no idea what I wanted to do. After studying abroad, when I came back to Virginia, before I left, I had applied to be—in my senior year, I had applied to do this internship program 'cause I'd never had an internship in my life, and the only job I had ever had was at the pizzeria. And then I also did some stuff in retail clothing stores, like Gap, Banana, Old Navy. They're all like related. They're all the same company. So I kind of thought maybe I should do an internship like before I graduate so that I kind of, I don't know, get some real-world experience, and also find out for myself what do I want to do. What path do I want to take?

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So when I came back to school, all of the internships that I had ranked my—I think they made you rank like six of what they offered, they had all been taken because when I was abroad, that's

when they did the placements. So they were like, "Okay, we'll place you when you come back." So all the ones that I had wanted were taken, which ended up being sort of fateful because, at the time, coming back from being in Italy, and having a really wonderful time, and eating and drinking and gallivanting, I said, "Do you have any—are there any internships like in food or anything to do with that?" And they were like, "Okay, well, let's look at event planning." And the woman who was in charge pulled up what came up from that search, and Starr Hill Brewery was in the list, and they had not completed their application, which I soon learned was extremely typical of our company, which is funny.

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So they hadn't finished submitting it, but they had shown interest in having an intern doing event planning and marketing and that sort of thing. And she said to me like, "Hey, if this is something you wanna do, let me know. We'll reach out to the brewery, and see if they still wanna have an intern." And I think I took like the evening to think it over, and then kind of emailed her, and was like, "Yeah, I want it. Of course, I want to go work at a brewery. I don't know what this means, but let's do it." And the only beer I'd ever had at that point was crappy light American lager: Keystone and Natty Light [Natural Light] and —

Sarah Rodriguez: The classics.

Allie Hochman: —yeah, Bud Light, whatever, all that kind of stuff. And so, at the time, I think, I didn't really love beer because it was just kind of gross, fizzy, yellow water, right?

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

Allie Hochman: And you had to drink a lot of it to get drunk, and that was always the goal at that age.

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But I remember I kind of dressed a little nice for my first—well, for the orientation that they always made you do first for the internship, you go to the facility, and it's kind of more of a screening process for the company to decide like, "Okay, is this person cool, and we wanna keep them as our intern, or are they crazy?" And so I guess I passed the test. But I remember I dressed kind of nice, and wore like little ballet flats and like a skirt, and I wore my glasses so that I would look more mature or whatever. And I was still 20 years old at the time 'cause my birthday's in September. I remember just walking around, and the production facility is from like the early 1900s, I think, so it's just kind of like in a little bit of disrepair, but also it's just like a big factory essentially. So walking around, there's water on the floor, and chemicals, and it's dark, and it kind of smells funny 'cause all kinds of crazy things are going on there. But I just remember walking around, and feeling out of place but also being intrigued.

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And my—they called them supervisors at the time, but I think now they call them mentors for the internship. He was showing me around, and I remember after he kind of showed me around, and we kind of just talked about the internship, he was like, "Oh, yeah, there's not really a dress code. You can just wear like jeans and a T-shirt." And I was like, "Oh, okay, cool." And then we didn't—so I think—I don't remember if it was that day or another day that I came to actually do some actual tasks, but I remember they—I remember him saying to me like, "Okay, you're not 21 yet, so we're not gonna do the beer tasting yet. But once you're 21, we will." I think that was on a

Friday, and the next Monday—my birthday was over the weekend, and they were like, "Okay, now we can do the tasting for you," so that I could become familiar with the product. And I remember the first beer that I tried was The Love, and that's our wheat beer, and it's still around to this day.

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And I remember taking a sip, and it's a Hefeweizen style, so a German style, and it's really, really aromatic. It's such a good style. I just remember taking my first smell and my first sip, and I was like, oh, beer tastes good. I like beer. And then it just kind of opened my eyes to the possibilities of what beer was and could be, and like this whole world that I didn't even realize existed, because you think of the big breweries, like Budweiser, Anheuser-Busch, whatever, and MillerCoors, that kind of stuff, and thinking about the product that they make, and at first glance when you don't know that much about it, it seems very generic and almost boring. But then realizing the history behind this beverage, and how—the history of beer in this country and all over the world, it's just really interesting to learn all about that, and to realize all of the different styles out there, and that was really cool.

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Sarah Rodriguez: That's cool.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. So I was interning at Starr Hill my last year of college. And upon graduating, I pretty much begged them to give me a job because I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I wasn't ready to finish that yet. And I could also tell that they still needed help. The stuff that I was doing there was not just busy work. I was like the marketing and events intern, so on

the marketing side, I was helping with, at the time, like Facebook, like social media, posting there, like posting pictures from events. I had done a few tastings at local beer shops and grocery stores, and little festivals like out in Crozet, outside of Charlottesville, and in and around Charlottesville, and worked on like the email newsletter, on the website, and —

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Allie Hochman: —and helped with design advertisements that were gonna go into different local papers and stuff like that.

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And then like setting up for—like preparing for events, like the initial activation, and then being on site, and talking to people about beer.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you had to know what you were talking about.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, and I was able to learn a lot because about a month into my internship, I started working on the weekends in the taproom that they had there.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

Allie Hochman: So, that way, I could, I mean, make some money but also to learn more about the beer and like how to talk about the beer. And at the time, the way Virginia beer law was set up is that they didn't—you couldn't have a taproom like this, like we're sitting in right now. You couldn't sell beer for people to enjoy on-premise as just a brewery.

Sarah Rodriguez: This was before 2012?

Allie Hochman: Yeah, this was in 2009.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, so when I started in the tavern. So the way that [Laughter] it's funny, it was just this big wooden bar basically off to the side of the production floor.

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Allie Hochman: So there was no temperature control. It was either—like, in the summertime, it was hot as hell, and in the winter, people are in there with their jackets on. Yeah, it was crazy. But at the time, the law said that you could serve for free, I think, six two-ounce pours. So people basically would come in, do a free tasting, they could fill a growler to go, which are the giant glass bottles, or they could buy like bottles or cans or kegs to go. So they couldn't really stick around to enjoy beer on-premise. But we would get fairly busy on the weekends with people coming up to the bar, and wanting to do the whole tasting flight, and then buying stuff to go, and it would just, you know, the days would pass by really quickly 'cause you'd just get so many people coming in. And you kind of had your little pattern to it. You'd give the couple like, "Okay, we're starting here with this beer," and you'd kind of make your way around the bar. And by the time you get back to them, you're like, "All right, you're ready for the next beer." But you'd also sit down in front of them, describe it to them. If it was a slower day, you could chitchat with people about where they're from and all that kind of stuff.

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So I definitely learned about all the different beers that we sold through working in the tasting room.

Sarah Rodriguez: So did you continue in your role specifically doing marketing and stuff after?

Allie Hochman: Yeah, I did. So they kind of—I don't [Laughter]—at first, my title was, unofficially, Junior Pro, Junior Professional. I kind of did—it's like with any small business, people wear a lot of different hats. So they definitely hired me to kind of continue on with social media and marketing and some of the advertisement design and some of the events, like tasting events, but also like larger festivals. And then I also was still allowed to work in the taproom on the weekends.

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But I was part-time, but I worked probably like 38 hours a week 'cause there was a lot to do. And I think at the time they were like, "We don't want you to work more than 38 hours a week 'cause we don't want to—we can't pay overtime." So some days of the week, it would be, you know, Friday morning, it'd be 10:00 a.m., and I'd be like, "Okay, I hit my 38 hours, I'm going home." Yeah, wild times. But it was a lot of fun. I mean, I got to do a lot of cool, fun, different things. And over time, I started to kind of take on more and more. So my mentor, he basically was doing—he was definitely —

Sarah Rodriguez: What's his name?

Allie Hochman: His name was Nate Sadler [sp].

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay.

Allie Hochman: We're still very good friends to this day.

Sarah Rodriguez: Good. That's a good sign.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, yeah. And he stuck around. He was like one of Starr Hill's early original employees, but he stuck around, I think, until like summer 2011. So we had a little bit of time together.

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But basically, as I started to help him out and take on more of the like social media and smaller event execution, he was doing a lot of the larger events. So, at the time, we were very involved in like Bonnaroo and FloydFest and All Good, 'cause we would send beer to those festivals, and then try to just sell like a shit ton of beer to all the patrons.

Sarah Rodriguez: And get your name out there.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. And then he was also doing sales, which is a lot, so like driving around basically the whole state, trying to get our beer into grocery stores and into different bottle shops but also into bars and restaurants, and stuff like that. So he was really busy, and he was on the road a lot, and so I was working in the tasting room but also handling some of the more stuff on site as far as marketing and the website and updating events, that sort of thing.

Sarah Rodriguez: Busy.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, it was a lot.

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And so eventually, I think my first summer there, he had trained me pretty well for like smaller single or multi-day but not like big—more like beer festivals; not necessarily like music festivals where we were selling beer as kind of like side portions. One of my first ones that I did, I think, I came to Richmond was like when they used to do the World Beer Festival, I think, on Browns

Island. I forget what it was called. But I remember it was on Browns Island, and you come and you spring your kit. Well, the distributor would have to bring your kegs, but you'd come and set up your jockey box, and bring all the little sell sheets and stickers on stickers on stickers, and hang up a banner, and you'd just hang out and wait for festival attendees to come around. And they would only get little samples, and they had their little commemorative plastic cup, and dad just talked to people about beer for like six hours or whatever.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, it was a lot.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's intense.

Allie Hochman: And it was hot as shit.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, I can imagine.

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Allie Hochman: But it was fun too, 'cause you'd go around and you'd make friends with all the other sales reps, and try their beers, and it was fun.

Sarah Rodriguez: So it was kind of like a community-building experience as well?

Allie Hochman: Yeah, 100%, especially because I am a small person, so people would just see me struggling with these heavy things. Not that I couldn't lift them, but people would be like, "Oh, let me help you with that, or you can't reach that to hang up this sign. Let me." People were very helpful and very kind.

Sarah Rodriguez: A great way to get to know people.

Allie Hochman: Exactly. Yeah, it was awesome. Especially at that time, there weren't as many local craft breweries, so it would be people coming from SweetWater down in Georgia and—I'm trying to think of other places—like Flying Dog in Maryland. And so you meet reps from different breweries from kind of like the Mid-Atlantic but also sometimes like bigger ones from across the country because, at that time, I mean, I think maybe Devils Backbone started in like '08, something like that.

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But Hardywood didn't start until 2011 or 2012, so they weren't even really around then, like in the summer of 2010. Legend was around, of course, so they would be at all these festivals too. But you get to see the same people at these different festivals.

Sarah Rodriguez: Especially 'cause there weren't that many.

Allie Hochman: Not as many Virginia breweries, but there were a lot of festivals, not every weekend, but sometimes it kind of felt like that over the early years.

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. And some are still happening now, some are just coming back after the pandemic, and then a lot kind of went away once—so in 2012, that's when they passed the law where you'd be able to serve beer on premises to customers for money. You could sell it to them [Laughter], as opposed to just giving away free samples. And that definitely changed the game.

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But before that, I also began to—as my mentor kind of wanted to make his exit, 'cause he was working a lot. Running festivals and then also traveling for sales was a lot of work, and you get tired running around all the time. And so he wanted to move on, and so he started training me to take over some of the bigger festivals. So I got to go to Bonnaroo and FloydFest, and I'm trying to think where else we did. Well, later on we did —

Sarah Rodriguez: Are you still part-time at this point?

Allie Hochman: No, I think probably, maybe like 2011, they made me full-time, like early 2011, and then I was like, "Yay, benefits," except for I didn't—it was more like vacation and 401K stuff. I was still on my parents' insurance until I was 26, thank god. I mean, pretty much the whole time that I was part-time, I was basically working full-time hours, and shit's sketchy when you have a small business, right?

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: It happens. But clearly I wasn't so angry about it that I wanted to leave.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

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Allie Hochman: [Laughter] It was a lot of fun at the time, and had a lot of perks for sure. And it was a good crew. We had fun. We hung out.

Sarah Rodriguez: In addition to Nate [sp], were there any other folks from those early times that you were there that you really connected with and —

Allie Hochman: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: —that are still here or who have left?

Allie Hochman: So it's funny you should say that. So right now, I think I'm like the number two longest-tenured employee. So the guy who's number one, his name's Timmy Green, he's a brewer, so he works at the main production facility in Crozet. He started there I wanna say like the summer before I even started interning, I think, so I think '08. And I remember, I think he—I'm not sure if he was ever on the packaging line, but he definitely worked his way up in the cellar, cleaning stuff, transferring tanks, and then all the way up to brewer. And he still brews to this day.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

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Allie Hochman: Yeah. But I think at the time, I was definitely more shy with all the guys in the back, and I definitely knew more of the office folks and front of house. So all the other tasting room employees, I knew. But the woman who ran the tasting room, her name was Melanie Rhodes [sp]—when did she leave? She probably left 2012 or 2013, I wanna say. But I definitely got a lot of information about the beers, but also how to take care of customers, and care about the customer experience, and keep them coming back, and turn folks into brand ambassadors for us, get people really excited about Starr Hill. I learned that from her 'cause she was really, really passionate about what she did, and about taking care of people, and about our product. And over time, I definitely became close with the original brewmaster who was also a part owner, and his name was Mark Thompson. I would work with him.

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Eventually, I was doing some of the design and advertisements and stuff but also then started designing some of the labels that we used on special, one-off beers, and working with him on that, or working with him and the folks that we hired to redo our website and to redo some of our labels, kind of working with him through that artistic process. I mean, everybody. So he's not there anymore, but Timmy's still there. Also the guy that's under me as far as being there for —

Sarah Rodriguez: Longevity.

Allie Hochman: —a long time is this guy named Dio Fazlali, and he has always been working in the warehouse. And he still to this day delivers me my beer, and so I see him every week, which is awesome to just have known him for this long. And I remember when his kids were born, and watching them grow up.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's special.

Allie Hochman: Yeah.

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But it's interesting 'cause both of those guys are back at the Crozet facility, so I don't see them every day, which is what I used to, but it's a little different now, but it's still good.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Do you remember how your work changed as a result of the bill that got passed in 2012, if your work specifically did change?

Allie Hochman: Not for a while. At that time, Mark definitely worked with the folks from Hardywood and Devils and probably Blue Mountain and a couple other breweries to help get that law passed. And then I think we had also just hired a guy. Mark was owner, founder, master brewer, but he was more of the dreamer, creative type, like a total Deadhead, followed them

around the country when he was younger, that kind of thing. And he was more of like that, like less about the day-to-day business operations.

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So we brought somebody in to handle that part. And so we brought in this guy named Brian McNelis, who had worked for Anheuser-Busch for a long time, and definitely gave a lot more structure to the organization, and also made some hires himself that really kind of helped us. I mean, at that point we had been around—so we started in 1999. Maybe he started in 2011, late 2011, I think, yeah, actually. I remember he started on my birthday in 2011, in September.

Sarah Rodriguez: Very nice.

Allie Hochman: So, when he started, he looked at where we were at, and was like, "All right, we're gonna need someone to do this, and someone doing that," and tried to figure out—we needed a little more structure, I think, on the brewing side, and also just in the organization of the office as well, and the sales team, and that sort of thing. So he definitely helped in that regard. So I think that was kind of his focus for the first year or two.

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And so even though that law was passed, we still had our free sample tasting room until I think in like late 2013, or mid to late 2013 is when they started thinking like, "Okay, we need to start rethinking how we do things because now that we can sell beer, that's another revenue stream for us," and also all these other craft breweries started popping up in Virginia all over the place at that time. I think Isley and maybe also Ardent kind of started in 2013. We were, I guess, plateauing at the time or whatever, and then all these other places started to shoot up. And people

were a little bit probably—not necessarily tired of us but more like, "Okay, I've had that beer. Let me try all these new places."

Sarah Rodriguez: Especially when so many new ones are popping up so quick.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, because, I mean, when I was in school, and once I was 21 and could go out on The Corner, that's the big area where the bars are in Charlottesville, we were the only craft beer on tap.

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Otherwise, it was like Guinness, Budweiser, Bud Light, I guess Sam Adams. But they were huge, and they still are, so it's a little different. But Starr Hill was the only local beer on tap, I should say. And now if you go there, it's all craft beer, pretty much, on tap. You could still get like Bud Light bottles or cans or whatever. But that was something that we started working on was like, okay, we need to create this kind of taproom experience that's different, and it can't just be like a bar in the middle of the production floor where it's loud as shit, and freezing cold or sweltering hot. And so I was still definitely working—

Sarah Rodriguez: I guess the taproom was just this little space?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. At the time, it was just like the Starr Hill tasting room, and we had little shelves with different merch items.

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And we had a display cooler that had beer to go, that sort of thing.

Sarah Rodriguez: But it probably couldn't handle the volume of what a tasting room . . .

Allie Hochman: Yeah, for sure. I mean, people would come in, and since they passed those laws, people would come in and be like, "Oh, I can't drink a beer here?" It's like, "No, sorry." We used to say, "Oh, Virginia law doesn't allow us to." But even once that law passed, I don't remember, if we changed that, it was just for a very brief time before we decided, okay, we need to demolish this space, and actually build like a real taproom that's comfortable and welcoming for people. And so that planning started in 2013. And at the time, I was definitely still in marketing, so working on different beer labels, and advertisements on the website, but also doing all of the on-site festival activation for the various festivals that we sponsored, all throughout the state but also in other states, and also handling all of the social media.

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So documenting that process was definitely part of my role. And at the time, I think, once I became full-time and more focused on the festivals, and I was there on weekends, I stopped working in the taproom as much.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

Allie Hochman: And when I had been doing both marketing and working in the tasting room, those were kind of like separate roles almost, and then as I started to get busier with marketing, I stopped working as much in the tasting room. We definitely had enough staff that could cover those shifts, and there were times I'd pop in and help out. But most of the time, over time, I definitely stopped doing that. So we opened our taproom at the Crozet location at the production facility in April of 2014. So we were still —

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember that day?

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Allie Hochman: I remember we had an employee event before we opened it to the public, where we all had beers together, and they brought in food and stuff. We took some pictures. I don't remember if I was actually there on the specific day for the grand opening because I don't know if I had another event or was going out of town or something. I can't remember specifically. But we had other folks that like someone else—by that time, I think, Melanie had left, and so we hired someone else to be our taproom manager, and they hired their own staff to kind of work the bar. But I was totally focused on marketing then and still doing festivals and stuff.

Sarah Rodriguez: It sounds like that was a huge job anyway.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. And by that time, we had a couple more members to our marketing team, and a finance guy, and a sales director, and a quality manager, and more brewers, and that sort of thing.

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So it was definitely growing at the time.

Sarah Rodriguez: Now, could you take me to how y'all ended up coming to Richmond, why you came to Richmond, and could you tell me also a little bit about this space?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. So in 2016, I think we were on our second or third taproom manager. I don't know if I was getting like burned out on marketing or just kind of like getting tired of the festival circuit and doing that, 'cause that's also a lot of traveling. And when you're there on site for those events, like Bonnaroo, I would be there for a week, and being in charge of

that, and the music goes literally all night, you basically have to be available 24/7. And having done that, I went every year, 2011 through 2017, to this festival, and then other festivals as well, so it was a lot.

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I was young but, at the time, I was just getting tired of it. We would pay so much money for these sponsorships, and not really sell enough beer to cover the sponsorship, just 'cause there's other breweries there. Bonnaroo's in Tennessee. People don't necessarily know Starr Hill there. So it would do all right but not really worth the money that we were putting into it. And just like hearing that from other people, it was just like, "Okay, why are we really doing this?" and feeling kind of like, "Is this really what I wanna keep doing?" and so starting to try to figure out, okay, what's the next step? And I remember, I think I was talking with one of my coworkers at the time, and just kind of not necessarily complaining but just I had a lot of ideas and passion behind service in the taproom and like, "Oh, we're on our third person. What's going on here? We need to change this. We should do that. We should do this," and just having a lot of ideas around it.

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And he was like, "You should take over this. You should be the person. There's no better brand ambassador for Starr Hill than you. You've been here for so long. You know the beers. You know how to talk to the customers. You used to work in the taproom, the tasting room when it was open." And I was like, "Yeah, why not?"

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: I'm kind of done with the whole traveling for festivals, whatever. I wasn't as passionate about the social media, which was getting more and more and more important. I think that was what kind of inspired me to take that over. And it was definitely a challenge because I was inheriting a lot of the issues from predecessors, and inheriting employees. And some of them were great, and some of them were tough to work with. I went through a lot of my own turnover in the time, managing that taproom. But, at the same time, we were also seeing that a lot of other craft brewers were opening satellite taprooms all across the state because with the way the Virginia laws are set up, you're able to sell beer basically to yourself at another location, which is great.

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So you're kind of cutting out the wholesaler so you're keeping all of that margin. So it's a great way to just kind of grow your business without relying on anybody else, and you don't have to worry about customers in the grocery store. I mean, in general, as soon as your beer leaves your dock, you have no control over it. And you always want the best product to go to the customer. So having these little taprooms all over the place in different communities is a great way to grow your brand and also keep control over your product to make sure it's the best possible product that's getting to your customer directly, and having that connection to the customer too. So we are seeing a lot of other breweries do that. Three Notch'd had started opening multiple taprooms. I think maybe Hardywood had at the time; maybe not. Other places too. But we were kind of inspired by that to say, "Maybe it's something we could do," even though we'd been around for a long time.

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But just trying something new for our brand because I think there was definitely a time, I'm sure, where a lot of folks were like, "Oh, Starr Hill, that's my grandpa's craft beer." So we were like, okay —

Sarah Rodriguez: It shows how quick craft beer turns over.

Allie Hochman: Oh, yeah. I mean, people always want what's new and what's fresh. They come here, and they look at the menu, and they're like, "I've had everything already. What do you have that's new?" And that's part of it too, like, having new products available all the time for people. It can be a lot on the large scale that we were producing it for the grocery stores and for bars and restaurants, and it's hard to just pivot, and quickly try to make lots of small batches, because you don't wanna be over-inventoried, and have stuff just sitting there that eventually you have to dump because it's however many years old. It's not ideal. So our first foray into the satellite taproom world was we looked down—We were looking, I think, across the state for an untapped market where either craft beer was still relatively new or there weren't that many other local places.

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And we decided on Roanoke as a great location for that because it kind of reminded us of our home in Crozet. It's a small town. It's definitely bigger than Crozet but not as big as—I can't remember if it's bigger than Charlottesville or not but —

Sarah Rodriguez: Roanoke?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. It might be. It might be. But, again, there are a couple colleges there. It's close to Virginia Tech but also there's a great music scene there. People are very into

the outdoors, and people like to have a good time. We'd always sold our beer down there in grocery stores, and we just had to look around, like, what would be a good location for us? They have a cute little downtown. There's Market Square that's similar to the downtown mall in Charlottesville.

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So we had looked around there, and we actually found this place about a mile south of downtown, but it was on the river. There's train tracks running behind it, which at our Crozet facility, there's train tracks running behind the brewery, so when the trains go by, people are always like, "What's that?"

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: They think there's a train that's gonna come through the window. So it kind of reminded us of that. And it was actually really cool because you step out of the back of this building, and you look up, and that's where the Mill Mountain Star is, and they call Roanoke the Star City, for that reason, because of that star up there. And we were like, "It's got our name in it already. It's perfect." And so we found this—there were these old—I think it used to be like a stable, and then it was something to do with the trains, something like that. But it was basically like they had broken up this building, this historic building into—I think one side was a Starbucks, and one side was like Moe's Southwest Grill, and there was a big space in the middle. And we're like, "All right, that's where we're going," because we were also figuring, you know, people are clearly coming there. The chains are there.

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But also we were never gonna do food there. So we're like, "Okay, we want people to be able to get some Moe's, and come inside, and not have to worry about that part. And so I was in charge of opening that space. I didn't choose that location, but I was definitely brought in to kind of look at it before all the documents and stuff were signed. And I was like, okay, this is our first one. I don't know. We had ideas of what we wanted to do based on what was needed at our Crozet taproom. And so we're like, "Okay, here's what we wanna do better next time." And so I got to kind of build it from the ground up. Obviously, we worked with architects, who where we're like, "Okay, this should go over here. This should go over here. You have to have this many bathrooms, and here's where we'll put the storage, and here's where the walk-in's gonna go." But a lot of the design of the bar, I got to choose, which was really cool.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's cool.

Allie Hochman: And then I hired everyone down there, and came up with all the programming.

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Sarah Rodriguez: You were still living in Charlottesville?

Allie Hochman: Yes, and so I had to go back and forth, and it was a lot, and had to adhere to the budgets that were given to me, and that sort of thing. So it was a lot, but it was a lot of fun, and we got it open. It was definitely interesting coming in from the outside, like, not being from Roanoke, but hiring folks from there, and also being a brewery that people down there definitely knew, but coming into their town, like, them maybe thinking we're not necessarily local. But they definitely welcomed us with open arms because craft beer was still pretty young in their

city. I remember, I think at the time, Parkway was open, but they're in Salem, so a little bit further away. Twin Creeks was open, and they're in Vinton, which is like not—it's basically Roanoke but a neighborhood away from downtown. I know that Deschutes had just come in from outside.

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They're a massive brewery, nationwide brewery, and they came in and opened a teeny little taproom on the Market Square. Ballast Point had just bought a huge production facility just outside of Roanoke. So people were like, "Oh, this area is ripe for the picking, as far as craft beer goes." But I think they were kind of looking at us as like, okay, we're maybe the largest craft brewery in Virginia or one of the largest craft breweries from Virginia at the time, thinking like, "Oh, they're coming here. That's exciting." And then being able to offer a lot more beers than other places. I think Deschutes had a bunch. But from some of the local guys, we had 23 beers on tap.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, wow.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, and we would rotate through them. And we also had a pilot brewery in that location. And Virginia law is still that if you're gonna open a satellite taproom, you have to brew at that facility, which is why we have a production facility here. So that taproom had a five-barrel system.

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And I think the law is something like 20% of the beer that you sell on-site has to be produced at that taproom; something like that. The reason I don't know the specifics is because that's actually not part of my—I'm not the manager of the production facility.

Sarah Rodriguez: You're technically just the taproom.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, so I'm more of like the customer side front of house.

Sarah Rodriguez: It just happens the back of house is right there.

Allie Hochman: Yes. Yeah, exactly. And we work together now and even then on what beers should get brewed, and what the customers are asking for, and what the staff thinks would sell, or whatever, or any kind of partnerships between local charities or other businesses like, "Oh, we're gonna do a collab beer," like working with production on that. But I don't know the first thing about actually—like, well, I know some about how the process works. But if you just threw me back there, I'd have no idea what to do, and how to run the machinery, and actually brew a beer.

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So opening that facility, and the success of it, and it's still pretty successful to this day, really kind of inspired us to look at the rest of the state, like, okay, where else could we maybe make this work? Because that was kind of our testing ground where we wanted to see our people wanting to come and drink Starr Hill beer. Will they still come and hang out with us and try all the beers that we have to offer even though they might see our bottles every day in the grocery store? And the answer was yes, especially with the ability to rotate through different small batches with the pilot facility, so the smaller brew house. But that was a lot of work, driving back

and forth, and managing two different staffs. That was a lot. When kind of the higher-ups said, "Okay, we're gonna open a couple more of these," I was like, "Okay, you need somebody who's in charge, who's with the boots on the ground in that location, like, has the connection to that community all the time."

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Because if I'm trying to go around to five, six, seven different places, that's a lot. The way we had it structured was I had hired two lead bartenders to run the daily operations of the Roanoke location, and I think I had one lead bartender at the Crozet location, and then I had a lot of part-time folks working. So the leads were the only full-time folks, and then I was full-time, of course. So we were trying to think through, okay, what makes sense going forward to run a bunch of these places? And so we decided there probably should be a GM at every single location if we're gonna do multiple locations, 'cause we had our ideas of where we might go after Roanoke. And I remember, this was—so we opened Roanoke, I think, in September 2017, and it was about a year later when we were kind of like, okay, it's doing really well. We had a good first year, and obviously there's some things we can improve upon but like success, check.

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And so then we started thinking, okay, where else might we go? And we started talking about Richmond. And at the time, it was kind of like—so having been in Charlottesville for so long since graduating, some of our friends, like our college friends, had stayed in the area, and some that moved away, whether it was up to D.C. or New York or Chicago or the West Coast, whatever. But we still had a fair amount of friends that stayed in Charlottesville. And over time,

over the years, they kind of moved away, and moved off to different places, so that most of my friends at the time were like work in industry folks. And it started to feel really small.

Sarah Rodriguez: Charlottesville?

Allie Hochman: Yeah, Charlottesville start to feel a lot smaller.

And we would travel a lot of the weekends, my partner and I, to go visit our friends in different places, D.C., Baltimore, wherever, Charleston, and just realizing like, okay, we're not spending a lot of time in and around Charlottesville, and it's getting to be a lot with work, and having this potential opportunity come up like, okay, well, I'm feeling really stressed, worrying about two different locations, maybe I could just focus on one.

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And I didn't wanna move to Roanoke. We didn't really know anybody down there. And I didn't necessarily wanna stay in Charlottesville because—and we had thought, like, being there for so long, we were like, okay, maybe once our friends wanna settle down and start having kids, they would come back to Charlottesville, because everyone had kind of always said that and talked about it. But, it turns out, a lot of my friends started moving to Richmond, and wanting to come to Richmond. And we had talked about Richmond being a place that craft beer's really big there. We would love to break into that market. Having an on-site taproom here would also hopefully boost our sales at the grocery stores and stuff as well, just kind of having that presence, and being considered a local beer. And so we had our eye on Richmond, and we were trying to determine, like, is the market saturated?

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If we come there, are people gonna care about another brewery? And I remember coming to Scott's Addition for a couple different weekend visits with friends, and being like, holy shit, there are so many fucking people here, and they're just bouncing around. You go into every single brewery, and it's packed on a Saturday. It's insane. There's lines, and you're just waiting and waiting for your beer. But everyone's having a great time, and just having it be so easy to get from one place to another, and realizing like, okay, people are still thirsty for this.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: And we looked at a couple other buildings in and around Richmond, but we realized Scott's Addition is the epicenter kind of the Richmond beer scene, and we wanna be part of that, and there are definitely—especially because there was so much construction in this neighborhood as far as apartments and other businesses moving in, moving their main offices to this neighborhood as a benefit to their employees, like, "Oh, come be in the cool, hip, up-and-coming neighborhood where you can go for happy hour after work at five different places on the same block."

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So we knew we wanted to be in this neighborhood, and we looked at a couple different buildings, but this building, I think, just because we knew that we were going to have to be really, really competitive compared to the other breweries in this neighborhood because we weren't from Richmond. And folks that are from Richmond are really all about things from Richmond, which is awesome. People are very proud of Richmond and what it has to offer. And I think, for the most time, that's earned. So we knew we had to compete on a higher level. And so we knew that it was gonna be all about the customer experience because most of the other places

that opened up definitely had cool, comfortable spaces, but they're still a production brewery first, and kind of a taproom second.

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And just a lot of these places, when they opened, were really focusing on their back of house because, at the time, I think, people were still interested in getting into the grocery stores and into restaurants and bars, and maybe growing throughout the state or throughout the region or throughout the country, when they first opened up, as opposed to realizing how much money you can make just by having a bar on your property. And so we were starting to kind of recognize that, and saying, okay, well, we need to have a pilot brewery on site because that's the law. We have to be able to produce a bunch of beer here. But we also care about being able to use these pilot facilities as R&D for larger batches that might eventually go to the grocery store. And also recognizing that everyone called it like the rotation nation, like, people just wanna see different beers all the time, so we knew we needed that flexibility, so to have a smaller system here than we had in Crozet, and just relying on Crozet to produce a lot of different varieties of beer, especially because each market is gonna be different in what they want to drink and what they're more interested in.

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And recognizing too that Richmond was a very mature craft beer market like that. You might go to Roanoke, and we would have food or aged sour ale on tap, and people down there would be like, "I don't know what that is, and I don't like the way it tastes." But up here, people would be like, "Oh, what kind of barrels did you use, and what kind of microbes did you inoculate this beer with, and whatever?" having that understanding just because of the people that came before

us, and also the craft beer bars that came before us, like Mekong being a huge supporter of craft beer but also just like beers from other countries and different styles and that sort of thing, and really starting that community here. So we wanted to be in Scott's Addition, and we wanted to make sure that our space was going to be very attractive to the folks here, so not only making it very comfortable and inviting but, also, a lot of these places, because the taproom was not necessarily an afterthought but they needed a minimum amount of space for the production facility, a lot of the taprooms here were really small.

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And so we wanted to go for a big space where people could bring all their friends, and meet up, and enjoy themselves. And we also just wanted to do something really cool. So we said, "Let's get a rooftop on this thing." And we wanted to be the first rooftop craft brewery in Scott's Addition. I think the Hof had a rooftop bar, but it's a restaurant. It's a little different. Also, a lot of places, I think, in Richmond don't have their rooftops open year round. And we were like, "We're gonna have it open all the time or as much as we can." And really, the only time we ever—it's ever closed and you are not allowed up there is during a lightning storm. Sometimes if it's snowing, I'm like, "Eh, probably not a good idea to have people up there." But, honestly, we have a little curtain enclosure, and we've got heaters over the bar in the ceiling. So while it's snowing, you could sit up there at the bar and enjoy a beer.

Sarah Rodriguez: So it's usable all year?

Allie Hochman: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's not perfectly sealed, like, the way —

Sarah Rodriguez: It's the rooftop.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, exactly.

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So it's still a little open to the elements, but you could go have a beer up there in the wintertime. And we try to open it every day that we possibly can. So that's kind of what we were really targeting was like more of the customer experience as opposed to the production. We knew we needed to have it, but we didn't—it wasn't really gonna be the focus of the experience here. We wanted to use it to create new and different fun beers for our customers to have, and we wanted to use it obviously because the law says you have to have it, and also for R&D purposes. But the main reason was we wanna offer people an amazing experience and like, I don't know, just be part of this community here. So, yeah, I was able to say, "I wanna move to Richmond, and I wanna run this place," and it worked out because now I think —

Sarah Rodriguez: That's great.

Allie Hochman: —of all the college friends we have spread across, like, we've got a pretty big group that sees each other at least once a year.

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We do a big Friendsgiving, but that's probably like 30 to 40 people, and probably like a third of those folks live in and around Richmond, which is awesome. So it's nice to be close to those folks again and be able to—I have plenty of industry friends and work friends that I like to spend time with, but it's nice to also be able to separate from that sometimes.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. I know, 'cause I moved away from Richmond. But, slowly but surely, more and more of my friends since college have come here. So I was one of the first ones.

Allie Hochman: Nice, the OG.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yes. So tell me about that kind of early time you coming to Richmond, and particularly going into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Allie Hochman: Oh, all right.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: So I moved here. I think originally the plan was we wanted the taproom to be open in like June 2019 or something crazy like that.

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But I think my boss at the time was like, "Oh, you can move in like April, and start getting ready, and planning, and hiring people, and getting it set up." But I don't think we actually started construction until May.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, wow.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, so that was silly. But I still moved in April.

Sarah Rodriguez: Was the shell of the building here?

Allie Hochman: Yeah, so this original building was, I think, before they divided it up for other tenants in this whole building, I think, at least straight back this wall. But, honestly, maybe the whole building was like an industrial cleaning facility, like industrial laundromat, essentially, and like linen services. And before us, the other tenants of the building are a community foundation. I think the Supreme Court of Virginia has a document storage here, which is really cool. They've let me in there one time, and they've got all these different rooms just full of files

and computers and books under special protective lighting, whatever. And then obviously Tazza Kitchen's on the corner. I think the ballet has a storage unit here somewhere, or something like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: You mentioned like a community space? [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: Yeah, it's interesting.

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And then behind this wall is actually a parking garage for all the people that work in this building, so not just us but the other tenants.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right. I saw like the mesh.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. So I remember when we started construction, at first, it was like, okay, we'll be able to open September, and then October, and then November, and then just kept pushing back. But I took that time to really figure out the programming plan. I was looking at my budget, and ordering all of the furniture and tables and chairs and glass racks and glasses and all that kind of stuff, working with the architects to figure out the design and the finishes on everything, ordering merchandise, starting to interview people and hire my team, from basically April through—I think I hired three lead bartenders to start, and I hired them in September, and they were gonna start in October.

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But—'cause by the time everything was kind of happening, there were a lot of issues with construction. So to have a rooftop, we had to dig up the floor, and build these. So all of these

columns that you see and all these supports were added because the actual roof itself, the building is this crappy, super thin, gypsum roof.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right. It's just meant to cover.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, and so we had to build basically a deck above the roof here. So it's two or three feet above this roof, and it's just this giant metal deck supported by all these columns. So the columns, they had dig out these massive holes in the building, and of course there's bad soil, and they had to reinforce it in a special way, and pour concrete in, and then cover it up, and then put whatever. It was insane, and it took way longer than we thought it would, of course, and then way over budget, of course. So everything kind of got pushed back. And at first, we thought we would open kinda like mid to late November, or do a soft opening like Thanksgiving weekend or something. And it kept getting pushed back.

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And by the time we were finally ready with all the permits and approvals and stuff, it was mid-December. So we did soft openings on December 12th and 13th, and then opened on December 14th, and it was nuts.

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

Allie Hochman: Yeah. We probably had over 1,000 people here on that first day. It was —

Sarah Rodriguez: That's awesome.

Allie Hochman: —shoulder-to-shoulder. It was packed in. Actually, we sort of based our service model a little bit off of Starbucks/Ardent, the way they do things where you have one person or certain people taking orders, and then somebody else pouring the beer, and calling out

the name of the customer, knowing that this neighborhood was a volume neighborhood, especially on the weekends. During the week, we were like, okay, it can be a little more casual. People can sit at the bar, and order a beer straight from their bartender, and have a conversation. But knowing that on the weekends that it was gonna be really busy, and that we just wanted to get as many people their beers as fast as we could. The whole day was just lines at both bars.

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But I also remember being on the phone for two hours with Toast, who's our point of sale company, because there were different people pouring the beers, they would have to pick up the ticket to pour the beer to see what they needed to pour, but both ticket printers were printing tickets from upstairs and downstairs.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, gosh.

Allie Hochman: So people were double pouring, and it was a whole mess. And we figured this out pretty quickly that it was happening, but it took a little bit for it—it took two hours to get it right.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, gosh.

Allie Hochman: Yeah, it was a lot.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. [Laughter]

Allie Hochman: But we figured it out. And at the time, I think Toast was a lot smaller. Pre-pandemic, they were still kind of small and very—you could talk to a person immediately. They were super responsive. They were really helpful. You would come to them with ideas, and they would work on it in development, and then implement a lot of changes. And they still do that,

but now they're a much larger company, or at least maybe they don't have enough employees and they're understaffed, because now it's a lot of automated menus and stuff.

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But they're in hundreds and thousands of businesses.

Sarah Rodriguez: Everywhere.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. And I think the pandemic really helped them grow because they were definitely at the forefront of QR code ordering and texting, whatever, all that kind of stuff, online ordering. I wanna say that the first—we were open almost three months to the day before we had to close again, and those three months were amazing and insane. There were some slower times but mostly, just compared to now, very, very busy. And people were not afraid to be up in here, and brush together, and having a great old time, and literally just standing on top of each other, just drinking beers, and it was great. And I remember, our last big event before we had to shut down was, like, we had our little St. Patrick's Day weekend celebration, and it was the same weekend as Shamrock the Block, which is this weekend. It's tomorrow, which is pretty crazy.

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But I remember we were posting on social media, like, "We're still gonna have our party, but your servers are gonna wear gloves, and we're gonna wipe up things." And nobody's wearing masks yet. It was more just like we're gonna keep the surfaces clean, and we're gonna use plastic cups, and whatever. And it was definitely not our, I mean, not by any means our slowest weekend but like slower than we were expecting, just because people were starting to become afraid, and not wanna be in crowds. And I think they canceled Shamrock the Block.

Sarah Rodriguez: I think so.

Allie Hochman: But we were still like, "Okay, well, you can still come out here, and nobody's told us to shut down yet, so we've got plenty of space on the rooftop. The weather's nice. Come hang out outside, whatever, or spread out. I don't know. We have a lot of space in here." And then I remember we decided that Monday—we closed for the whole day on Monday. We were like, wow, okay, the whole world's shutting down overnight. But then we were already kind of talking like, "What are we gonna do?" We ended up furloughing all of our part-timers.

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And the full-time folks, we kept on because we decided we were gonna sell to-go beer. A lot of breweries kind of pivoted to that right away so that they could employ people and also keep up some sales.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you have canning here?

Allie Hochman: No, so we basically just had whatever package that we had from Crozet. So I order beer every week from Crozet. And right now, honestly, with our pilot brewer, with Jeff here full-time now, which he only started like this past fall, 'cause before we would send brewers down to come brew for us, and fill up the tanks, and then keg. So we would have a couple different batches at a time. But now that he's here brewing every week, we get a lot more new beers. So, right now, my menu probably has like—probably a third of it is pilot beers. A quarter to a third of it is pilot beers that he's made here, and then the rest comes from Crozet. But all the package, like cans and bottle...we don't do that many bottles anymore, but all the cans and stuff and some of the kegs come from Crozet.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

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Allie Hochman: So we would just get like week...like, they would just drive down with massive to-go beer orders, and we would just sell those. But it was horrible. I mean, we opted to do delivery for people if they wanted delivery orders, but it was very slow. We had some loyal, regular customers that were part of our Mug Club that would come out and buy beer to go, and come see us. I agree with this. If I was a customer, and I could get Starr Hill beer at the grocery store when I'm gonna go and make one trip when I shouldn't even be leaving my house, but I have to go to the grocery store, so I might as well get it then, why would I make an extra trip to go somewhere else or I'm gonna be in contact with another person? So we didn't do too hot during that time, but our grocery store sales as a company were insane, so that was good, I guess. And we were able to keep our jobs and that sort of thing.

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But once they changed the mandates where we could reopen, we did—like, I think Memorial Day weekend, we had our Mug Clubbers in for a test run, and we were really, really anal about the whole process. We spaced out all our tables, and measured everything. We had signs everywhere. Everybody wore gloves all day, and masks all day. We had both doors open so that we always had kind of like—and the fans on. Because we have high ceilings, we're like, all right, we're keeping the air flow. And we basically, because they were allowing us to reopen—that's the thing. Maybe if it had been my company, I would've done it differently, but because it's not my company, and I couldn't really decide, and I wanted to keep my job and make money and whatever, I stuck around, and some of us made it through. We brought back some of the part-

time folks that wanted to come back. We didn't force anybody to come back. We just said, "Hey, here's what our plan is. Here's how we're gonna make sure you're safe. Here's how we're gonna make sure our customers are safe." We did reservation-only for probably the first six months.

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We still had availability beyond that. We had a wait list, and we had a host stand outside, and we would have people stand in line, spaced apart. We'd have all these lines drawn, and all these cones, and everything. We had a security guy that was there too to maintain order on the weekends, make sure people were standing far apart. We put a lot of effort into, before we reopened, making the plan of how we were gonna do it safely. And I felt okay about that, but also I was just trying to not think about the risk while making sure that my staff felt safe. But also I was here all the time with them, working the shifts, like, if there was a problem customer, kind of telling 'em, "Hey, this is our policy. Yeah, you can take your mask off when you're at your table drinking a beer, but you should put it back on in between sips." And we weren't enforcing that too much, but if people got up from their table, we would remind them like, "You need to have your mask on when you're walking through the space," kind of thing, which in hindsight is like so crazy that everyone was here all together in the same room.

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But we didn't have any outbreaks. We never had to shut down, like, not that employees didn't get it or get exposed elsewhere, but we had enough staff come back that we were able to cover if somebody was like, "Oh, my throat hurts." Like, "Okay, well, you haven't been in contact, we haven't been exposed, great. Okay, you stay home, and don't come back until this, that, and the other thing." We had our whole, like, as a company, had our whole policy planned out, and what

we would do in those situations. So we were really very lucky that nobody got it during that time when it was bad. I feel like—

Sarah Rodriguez: Especially before vaccines.

Allie Hochman: Exactly, and when the tests were so rare. And the city never made us do contact tracing, but we did collect a name and phone number for every single person for their reservation. So I think there was one time we got a call from the city like, "Oh, this person that reported that they tested said they came here," and I was like, "Oh, yeah, this is the date," and whatever, was able to give them whatever information they needed. But the rules always change.

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It means you're exposed if you're with this person for this much time, no, this much time. Were you wearing a mask or not? Were you outside or not? All the things you had to keep in mind, oh my god, it was crazy. Most people were nice, but there were a lot of people who were assholes. And it's hard not to remember those. But we made it through. It's kind of crazy to think about.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

Allie Hochman: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: So this is definitely a pivot but, as we're wrapping up, I do wanna ask about Pink Boots Society. So tell me how you got involved with that, what your experience has been like with that.

Allie Hochman: So I remember, I think the first meeting I went to was at Stone [Brewing], and this is when I still lived in Charlottesville, so it might have been like 2016, 2017, 2018, maybe 2018, maybe before I even knew I was moving to Richmond but just kind of wanting to

be part of that community, having been in the industry for so long, and recognizing that it was male-dominated, and most of the folks I was seeing at festivals and events were dudes.

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And also having worked in the taproom, and realizing like, oh, people are maybe not listening to me when I—no, they're not coming to me for information about beer, thinking I don't know anything. Whereas I have all this experience and knowledge just from being in the industry for so long. But, yeah, and just also having friends like coworkers that were like, "Oh, come on, we're gonna go check out this club, and see what's going on with that." So I remember attending the meeting at Stone, and then it wasn't until I moved back to Richmond that I got to meet some of the women at other breweries. They had, I guess, taken up the mantle at that point, and invited me to join. And I would go to meetings occasionally. I think I was able to go. I had a lot more flexibility to go and do whatever I wanted when I first moved here because we weren't open yet, and I was kind of in the planning stages. So I was able to actually meet a lot of women in the industry, and make those connections, and become friendly with them.

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And I remember—I don't remember what year it was. I think it was probably pre-pandemic. I can't remember. So the way it's structured is that there's usually co-chairs, not just one person in charge, because usually one's been in it for a little longer running it, and then they kind of bring somebody in that's newer. And then eventually, as that person kind of—as the original person kind of moves on from their commitment, you're bringing in someone new that you're kind of like training.

Sarah Rodriguez: So there's a little bit of an overlap?

Allie Hochman: Yes. Yeah, exactly. But I don't know if it was a result of the pandemic. I mean, obviously with the pandemic, we stopped meeting regularly. And once breweries and bars and restaurants kind of reopened in a small way, we kind of were like, "Okay, well, if you feel comfortable, we can have a social at this place that has a patio outdoors, or we can have a meetup at this place."

1:15:00

People came. We met on the patio here. We went to the patio at Legend. I think we went outside at intermission brewing in Glen Allen. And so we basically were just like, "Times are tough. Everything sucks. Let's just meet up and have beers and hang out and see each other and be social, because it's been really hard to be home or be at work getting yelled at for stupid reasons." One of the co-leaders got a new job. So she had been working at Stone, and she got a new job with the Department of Agriculture, and I think she felt like it was a conflict of interest for her to be in the Pink Boots Society and be part of the organization that oversees a lot of the breweries in Virginia, 'cause we're under the Department of Agriculture. And so she was like, "I can't be co-leader anymore." And maybe she was also tired of it. I don't know. All I heard was like the after effects.

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And so my friend Jamie [sp], who worked at Väsen at the time, approached me and said, "Hey, do you want to come be a co-leader with me? I can't do this all by myself, and you're really awesome and whatever. Do you wanna do this? You've been in the industry a long time." And I

thought about it, and I was like, "Sure, why not?" because I had had a good time getting to know the folks that were in the club, in the organization, and just being proud of being part of the beer industry for so long, and just wanting to also help other women, empower other women in the industry, and show them it's not just all about the dudes here. We can do a lot of cool things too, and you know just as much as any man that walks in here, that sort of thing. So I decided to be a co-leader with Jamie [sp], and I think that was October 2020. I think that's when I became a co-leader. I think so. I think that makes sense.

Sarah Rodriguez: That sounds about right.

Allie Hochman: And so we ran that together for a while, and we would have like monthly meetings. For a long time, it was mostly social still, and even as things started to open up.

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We had a couple educational sessions. But once things really—I think once we made it through 2021 into 2022, that last, like, the Omicron season, basically after that, when there were boosters and stuff available, and people started being more comfortable, I guess, with going out, or it had just stopped being in the news as much, or like when people were getting sick, they were doing the right thing, and testing and staying home, and it wasn't where people were getting hospitalized as often, we were like, "Okay, let's kind of make this organization into what it's supposed to be, which is helping women professionally in the brewing industry," so starting to organize more educational sessions and that sort of stuff. So that's kind of what we've been doing lately. I mean, we still have social meetups. But, yeah, I mean, I think next month we're meeting, we're doing a collab meeting with the Hampton Roads chapter.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice.

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Allie Hochman: And I think the month after that, one of our members who won a scholarship to go out to learn all about hop production out in the Pacific Northwest is gonna present kind of her findings. Any scholarship that you get through Pink Boots, they have an aspect of it that's called Pay it Forward, so you're just trying to educate your chapter or other people that are part of Pink Boots about what you learned and experienced.

Sarah Rodriguez: It's very cool.

Allie Hochman: So, yeah, it's fun. I mean, all the friends I've made through that group are awesome, and I see them at least once a week.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, nice.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. We have a lot of fun together.

Sarah Rodriguez: Good.

Allie Hochman: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Well, I wanna be respectful of your time, but is there anything off the top of your mind that you wanna mention, or any stories that popped up that I didn't ask about?

Allie Hochman: I don't think so.

Sarah Rodriguez: Great.

Allie Hochman: I don't think so.

Sarah Rodriguez: Awesome.

Allie Hochman: Yeah. I appreciate your time.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, thank you. I appreciate it.

[End]