



David Gott

Legend Brewing Company

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Sarah Rodriguez: This is Sarah Rodriguez with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is March 14th, 2023. I'm here at Legend Brewing in Richmond, Virginia. Do you mind introducing yourself for the tape?

David Gott: I'm David Gott. I'm the operations manager for Legend Brewing Company.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sweet. And would you say your birthdate for the record?

David Gott: May 4, 1960.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. Tell me a bit about where you were born, where you grew up, what your childhood was like?

David Gott: I was born here in Richmond and grew up here. Went to grade school, high school, left and went to college. Left and spent some time overseas and then came back to Richmond, then left again to teach somewhere and then came back to Richmond. So I've come and gone several times. It's a great little town.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah.

David Gott: Got a big family so we're kind of a tight big family so it's a good place to be.

Sarah Rodriguez: And could you tell me a bit more about your family, what your parents did, your siblings?

David Gott: Sure.

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We lived in a neighborhood, The Boulevard it was called then, now it's called the Museum District. It's all swanky now.

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

David Gott: My mom was pretty much a stay-at-home mom. She did some babysitting and eventually ran the cafeteria at the grade school we all went to. My dad was a printer. The technical term for what he did was a lithographer. Back before digital stuff they would make large things of film and the lithographers would cut them and strip them off the film and then relay them back into a piece that got overlaid on plates that were chemically etched. And that went on the printing press and that's what made the magazines you would've read back then before digital stuff.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah.

David Gott: The nickname for that particular job is a stripper, so basically when the nuns in Catholic school said, "What does your dad do for a living?" it was always very exciting to stand up and go, "My dad's a stripper."

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They didn't get a big kick out of it, but the other students loved it. They thought it was great.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter] That's funny. And how many siblings have you got?

David Gott: Three. One has passed and I have two sisters that are still in town.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm. Nice. And what was food like growing up? What do you remember about food in your family?

David Gott: My mother's side of the family was kind of Irish Italian, I think a little more Italian, so there was a lot of spaghetti. I still have my great-great-grandmother's spaghetti sauce recipe that we make every so often.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, cool.

David Gott: It was food, you know. It was what we had for dinner every night and breakfast every day and lunch was whatever sandwich was in the brown bag if you didn't like the cafeteria lunch.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

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David Gott: It was a lot of meatloaf and pork chops and things like, these standard kind of southern family staples.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right. For sure. And how were you exposed to beer growing up? Did your parents drink it in the house?

David Gott: Not really. Not really. My mom would drink some wine once in a while. Dad would have a beer once in a while. It was very rare. I think my biggest exposure was when I turned eighteen it was legal at that point for us to drink beer. I helped run a small—it wasn't craft beer back then, I guess more imports really and beer section in a small market in The Fan called The Fan Market. It was on the corner of Robinson and Stuart. One of my really good buddies, his dad was one of the owners and his ownership part was physically running the place.

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And so my buddy, Jimmy [sp], and I kind of handled the wine and handled the beer and just, man, enjoyed doing it. So I guess that's where I really got my start, broke my teeth on Guinness and Watney's Red Barrel and John Courage and things like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, that makes sense. And tell me about where you went to school, and then leaving home after high school and what was happening after that.

David Gott: The west of the Boulevard then was kind of a compact neighborhood. It really revolved very much around St. Benedict's Church, St. Benedict's School, Benedictine. Not making it up no matter how cliché it sounds, I walked to school every day for, like, twelve years and we lived four blocks from the schools so literally walked to school every day. It was not uphill. It was very flat.

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The whole neighborhood went. You'd be walking to school and your buddy a block up would come out and then you'd be walking up with them. The ladies on the other side, the girls on the other side would come out and they'd walk up with you, and you'd have big groups walking up to school together. So yeah, it was Catholic school taught by nuns from kindergarten up through eighth and then went to Benedictine High School, military Catholic high school taught by priests and it's kind of what you would expect. It is all the stories that you hear, and you don't believe are true. I still—the hair on the back of my neck goes up when I see a ruler, things like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm, that makes sense. And then, what happened after high school?

David Gott: So after high school I ended up going to Longwood College. They had a really interesting science program there and that's kind of what I wanted to do with myself.

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I wasn't sure what exactly. It's kind of broad but it's what I wanted to do. Science always fascinated me. I spent four years there on campus, got a degree in earth science with a minor in biology. I have a degree in philosophy. And yeah, it was a great time. It was fun. You know, college is college.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, for sure.

David Gott: And there was more beer.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, very true, very true. And was it mostly imports at the time or . . . ?

David Gott: Well, in college it was whatever you could get for ninety-nine cents. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Exactly. That's funny.

David Gott: I did learn though—'cause I would come back and work at The Fan Market in the summertime and make money to get me through the year and help pay for college—I learned that if I would buy cases of Guinness, which my boss would sell me at cost, I could take five, six, seven cases of beer back to school with me and all I really had to do was share the first bottle and then no one else would ever drink my beer.

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So my beer was safe. Even in an unlocked refrigerator it was fairly safe.

Sarah Rodriguez: So Guinness wasn't really the taste of your friends? [Laughter]

David Gott: Oh, no, no, no. That was something you saw in Irish pubs and that's about it.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. So you thought you wanted to go into science?

David Gott: Yeah, something in a science area. I wasn't really sure. So when I graduated I went to work at the same printing company my father worked at doing nights trying to kind of get my head straight and decide what to do. I had applied to the United States Peace Corps and ended up somewhere I guess right around June I was called in to be assessed and jumped through all the hoops and by September I was on a plane heading to Nepal.

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I spent two years there.

Sarah Rodriguez: What was that like?

David Gott: A whole 'nother interview. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: That's fair. That's fair.

David Gott: It's very, very, very, very different from what you would expect. One of the very vivid first memories was when we landed and they opened the doors to the plane and we stepped out the door and I thought, oh, my God. I hope the whole country doesn't smell like this, and the whole country smells like that. Lots of curry and lots of cows roaming; the sheep that are on the streets and stuff. Yeah, it was fascinating. A very life changing kind of thing. So did that and then traveled a little bit on the way home. Had a friend who was Peace Corps Africa. Went to visit her and traveled around a bit. And got back home and went to work back at the printing company.

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And then got an opportunity to teach so I taught for a few years, but before I had left and gone overseas again too. I worked with ITT in The National Science Foundation.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where were you for that?

David Gott: McMurdo Station Antarctica.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, okay.

David Gott: Worked at the naval station and then got transferred to the air strip which was out on the actual ice. They're landing C-130s on skis out on the ice. It's pretty cool.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

David Gott: And then came back and that's when I went to teach for a while and met my wife while I was teaching, and we ended up moving back here. There was a little of this, little of that, and I was not happy with where I was working at the time and ended up—a buddy of mine from grade school was managing a warehouse for a beer distributor and Corona had just come on the scene. It had not been available before.

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And one of the things they demanded was a dedicated brand manager and none of the guys there knew anything about anything like that, so I ended up with that job. Just kind of talked my way in the door there and ended up doing that for a few years.

Sarah Rodriguez: So that was kind of your first larger foray into kind of the beer behind the scenes business?

David Gott: Um-hm. Yep.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay. And how was it working there and how long did you work there?

David Gott: I was there for a total of five years. The first three was as Howard Distributing Company. The way the beer business works in the state of Virginia is, it's a lot like car dealerships, there can be only one. So it was the Schlitz's-Old Milwaukee-Stroh's distributorship and they had some pretty nice imports but, again, imports weren't huge at that time. And, of course, Corona, which was an easy sell because everybody wanted it.

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You just sat by the phone really and said, yeah, yeah, we'll get you some. But organized a lot of events and things. All the Cinco de Mayo you see we started here in town.

Sarah Rodriguez: All the big events.

David Gott: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: That makes sense.

David Gott: So that was the first foray into beer.

Sarah Rodriguez: And I guess you decided you wanted to stick around in the beer business after that experience, yes?

David Gott: Not to sound cliché but it's kind of addictive, yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, really.

David Gott: It's a fun business, especially when you're young. It's a fun business. And what ended up happening was a wine company from up north purchased our distributor and two other distributors and wanted to sell wine and beer and they wanted to do it their way and that doesn't

always go over well down here. There are a lot of little joints that sell a lot of beer but don't have any storage and they only wanted to go once a week and this and that.

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It was a real mess for about three years. They finally got out of the business, sold all the beer off, so all the beer people were laid off. And Tom Martin, the owner here, had just started this place up, like, maybe a year and a half, two years before and I had been talking to him because I wanted us to get the rights to sell his beer, which he didn't do. He ended up having kind of a proprietary distributorship. And when I got laid off the general manager that was running the place for him then I had known from festivals and things. He was the president of the home brewers. We knew each other pretty well, and he said, "We're about ready for a sales rep," and they hired me on. So that's how I started here.

Sarah Rodriguez: Around when was that?

David Gott: November of [19]96.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay. Okay. And tell me about getting to know Legend even before you started working here.

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How'd you get connected with the folks here?

David Gott: Well, what you see up here is not the original pub, the original building. The original pub, and I can show you afterwards, is downstairs and it's actually smaller than this room.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

David Gott: Yeah. This was just an abandoned building at that point. And so we had the brewery down there and we had the small pub, and it just became such a phenomenon that we had to do something so, I want to say it was [19]97, we added the deck, and we were selling beer out of the window up here. You could go downstairs and buy tickets, come up with your tickets and you could sit on the deck. And then in [19]98 we opened the inside up. But yeah, for the first—what is that, from [19]94 to [19]98—the first four years it was just down in that little tasting room.

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And when we're done we're gonna walk outside. You will see some old guys sitting out there who were here then.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

David Gott: We've got some very, very good regular customers and there's always the stories about, "I remember downstairs." It's a great closeknit community. Everybody says it's like Cheers here.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. That's good.

David Gott: And it really kinda is.

Sarah Rodriguez: Very cool. And so tell me a bit about that early time of you working here at Legend. What were you working on and what were y'all focusing on? What was that experience like?

David Gott: We had four year-round beers, a lager, a pilsner, a brown ale, and a porter, and then we added a golden IPA back when no one anywhere knew what the hell an IPA was. They'd never heard of it. They wanted to pronounce it "ipa." They thought it stood for something else. They had no earthly idea what an IPA was. No one in America really. I know we did a porter, as well, and most people didn't know what a porter was. So unless you were drinking Sam Smith's from England—they did a Taddy porter and they did an IPA, and if you weren't drinking those nobody knew what the heck they were.

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So we had the five basic beers. We were running two trucks out of the back of the building delivering beer to restaurants and eventually to grocery stores. And we were in 22-ounce bottles. We didn't do any six packs or anything like that, all 22-ounce bottles.

Sarah Rodriguez: Did you have bottling in-house?

David Gott: Yes. Everything was done in-house, everything.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay.

David Gott: So we kept growing, kept growing, kept growing and the demand to get bigger got to the point where we kinda needed to get into that six-pack, 12-ounce bottle format. One of my counterparts downstairs, Rick Uhler, who had been here before I was and kinda one of the delivery guys, took over Legendary Distributors, it was called.

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And one of the conclusions that we all came to was just dropping a few cases of our beer in a store here or there really wasn't a financially sound business plan, so Rick started bringing other

craft beers onboard. Legendary Distributor was the second largest craft beer distributor in the area and a lot of the beers that Rick brought into this area are still here today, Heavy Seas, Victory.

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

David Gott: All that Golden Monkey out there, we used to sell a ton of Golden Monkey through here. The two businesses were separate, but we worked pretty close together and Rick built that company up to a sizeable, sizeable company. And in 2009, Tom decided that he was going to sell Legendary Distributors the rights to the beers as the State of Virginia allows you to, he'd sell those rights to Brown Distributing Company which is the local Budweiser franchiser.

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And he sold the rights to the whole state for all of the beers that Legendary Distributors carried. I should have prefaced, I guess, Tom brewed for Anheuser-Busch and his father was a vice-president there. So our guys aren't just a bunch of home brewers, they literally were brewing beer before home brew was cool. And he sold those rights, and the proceeds went into getting us a bottling line, expanding downstairs with coolers and stuff, and we started with six-pack 12-ounce bottles. And things were very, very good for a few years and then the explosion happened. And we'd seen these explosions happen before. It's, like, oh, my God, Pete's Wicked Ale is coming to the market. It's gonna ruin everything for us. Redhook's coming to the market. It's gonna ruin everything for us. Malternatives, you name it, we watched 'em all come, and we watched 'em all go, and we survived them all.

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It's twenty-eight years and we're still here.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

David Gott: It's tougher now but it's twenty-eight years and we're still here. And you can see what's going on around us. When those apartments, the apartments they're gonna build across the street, the ones they're gonna build down there finishes, a thousand new people across the street literally from us.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

David Gott: Getting through the construction's gonna be something. Roads are blocked off, you can't park anywhere, but the pub's role is gonna change dramatically, I think, when all this is finally in.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, that makes sense.

David Gott: The parking really isn't gonna matter. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Sure. So tell me a bit about what this neighborhood was like kinda early on when you first started here.

David Gott: It's really funny. It was desolate and fairly barren and industrial. The big slab down in the bottom here from right where the train sheds are down here all the way up to Hull Street was Reynolds Aluminum, which became Alcoa.

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They pressed out aluminum foil there. Three-thirty when the shift was over we'd fill up with their guys and some of 'em still come up today even though they've been gone for years and

years. And we have those guys, and we have our next batch of regulars that would come in. And they're so regular we literally took the clock off the wall and one of the managers just cut out pictures of everybody. And the bartender would look at it, oh, it's ten o'clock. I'll pull Tim's mug out and get it ready for him.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow. Like, very much on a schedule, very consistent.

David Gott: Yeah. In fact, so much so that there have been occasions when one of us has called somebody going, everything okay? Haven't seen you in a couple of days. It's like, I'm on vacation. It's like, would you please let us know so we don't worry?

Sarah Rodriguez: Aww.

David Gott: Yeah. It's like that. It's really like that.

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It's a tight bunch of people. It's a good bunch of folks.

Sarah Rodriguez: So that was the crowd at that time for the most part?

David Gott: Yeah. And again, some of 'em are still here. But you'd show up at eight in the morning and you could park anywhere you wanted, there was nothing. There was nothing going on. Thurston Spring Company was there. Bass Crane was over there. They had a big parking lot. Then there was just nothing. So it was quiet, it was easy to move around. And we were a real destination tourist-wise. We had a great following from Richmond but literally people from all over the world. One of our stockholders was playing in a golf tournament at St Andrews in Scotland and he was wearing a Legend hat and one of the golf pros from the course walked over, he was, like, "I've been to that place." And Mike's, like, "Yeah, I'm a stockholder in this."

Sarah Rodriguez: No way.

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David Gott: They were best friends from then on. Yeah. Lots of Germans coming over and hanging out because we do a nice complement of German beers. We've even got a crowd of Russian folks that come in. They sit on the corner of the deck and drink all day long and nobody knows what the heck they're sayin' but they have very animated conversations. We've always been a big destination so, yep, it's been kinda nice.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, that's cool. And so you mentioned the thinking about the explosion after 2012. Do you remember what it was like leading up to SB 604 and some of those changes? And what was it like in the kind of early years right after that, especially after y'all being in the game so long?

David Gott: Yeah. Leading up to it, it's kinda hard 'cause we were here and really cool before beer was.

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Then beer got cool, but we'd already been here a long time so everybody's, like, uh, you guys, you've been here forever. This new guy just opened up. He's been brewing beer for five weeks. We're, like, yeah, okay. Got it. But we had some good competition. Those guys at Hardywood, they're really top-notch brewers. They do a great job. They're great marketers. Brew really good beer. Center of the Universe came along. One of our brewers left and became their head brewer. We actually for a while were calling ourselves the craft brewing training school. Another one of our brewers is at Strangeways and another went to work with him at Strangeways and left and

went to work for—I can’t even think of it. I can’t keep them all straight anymore. When we started in [19]93 I want to say there were, like, 347, 360 breweries in the United States of America. There are almost 400 in the state of Virginia right now and there are more in the city of Richmond, way more in the city of Richmond than there were in the entire state.

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So it is difficult. Some come and go. Most have shown some real lasting power so it’s kind of interesting. It would be interesting for me to be able to step out on the outside and look at it instead of being right here in the middle of it because I can’t think of anything other than maybe Starbucks or McDonald’s in the [19]60s that has—an industry like that that has just, over the course of a couple of years, gone nuts. Literally, Starbucks will have stores across the street from each other. And you can go to Scott’s Addition, and you’ve got breweries practically right next door to each other, so it’s really kind of interesting.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

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So y’all started, say, in [19]94?

David Gott: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember some of the early individuals or early breweries that were around in the [19]90s that didn’t last?

David Gott: Yeah, I guess, ‘cause we are the oldest operating craft brewery in the state of Virginia, so Dominion Brewing Company was around before us, and I blank on the owner’s name. Really, really nice guy. Very helpful when we opened up. Several of the vessels we use

downstairs we bought when he upscaled his brewery from a thirty-barrel system to a fifty. Just really nice guy. But he sold and his business was bought up and moved to Frederick, Maryland. I want to say Wild Goose; I can't remember who bought it. There was Steamship Brewing Company back in the day and they went out of business, and we bought them. And some of the rest of the equipment is stuff we got from them. They had a thirty-barrel system.

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You had Richbrau who has been through three different iterations; the very obvious early, early, early one that my grandfather drank. There were three guys who opened it, which is really interesting. Graham [sp] I met through my wife 'cause he took his dog to the vet clinic she worked at. So those guys opened up and they made a go at it. The beer was good, but the layout was odd. And it was a huge building, three stories. In the wintertime they just couldn't heat it.

Sarah Rodriguez: And where were they?

David Gott: Cary and 13th.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay.

David Gott: I think it's an office building now but it's right on the corner of Cary and 13th, big, tall building. And then, Mike, the guy that owned . . . oh, wow.

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I shouldn't have eaten that big meatloaf. That's what it is.

Sarah Rodriguez: It's messing up your brain.

David Gott: Makes me want to go to sleep.

Sarah Rodriguez: I hear you.

David Gott: Mike Banks [sp]—not Mike Banks; he was the brewer—bought Richbrau from those guys and reopened and he owned Sam Miller’s. And I think they had an identity crisis. Much like us they were a restaurant, they were a brewery, and then he put pool tables upstairs, and then on the third floor put a nightclub in. And I think they just had an identity crisis. There was a lot of loud stuff going on upstairs, so people didn’t want to sit downstairs and pay a lot of money to eat.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah.

David Gott: So they didn’t last. And now they’re in a new iteration in a new place and I don’t hear a lot about them, but I think they’re doing okay. They’re on 25th and Main, I think. So those guys were the original guys who were around then.

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Gosh, who else? There was somebody out in the west of Virginia. I couldn’t remember who if my life depended on it. But there were maybe seven. There was James River Brewing Company that really wasn’t here. This was just an office for them, and all their stuff was being contract brewed.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh.

David Gott: Yeah. It’s really funny ‘cause people would come down here and it was, like, we’re going on a brewery tour. We just hit Richbrau. We’re here to see you guys and then we’re gonna go to James River Brewing Company. I was, like, enjoy their fax machine.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

David Gott: Then Bob Caviness [sp] opened Main Street Brewing Company. Yeah, there's been so many that have come and gone, and it's been in waves. It was us all by ourselves, then were three or four of us, and then it was us all by ourselves, and then there were a couple more.

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So it's kind of been this sine wave until about 2010 when the wavelength went way up.

[Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, for sure.

David Gott: Or the amplitude went way up.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right. And during that time where craft brewing was really growing did it feel like another one of those ups and downs or what did y'all think about it?

David Gott: It felt like this was gonna come and go at some point until SB 604. That really changed everything because, let me tell you, if you can run a bar with a couple of people slinging beer, it can be profitable. If you have to have a full staff—we had to have a restaurant. That is our business model so it's kind of like running two businesses.

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Then you add the front office and all the HR stuff it's kind of like three businesses really, which is probably the hardest part of the job is trying to knit those three together and make sure that this one understands what that one needs and that one understands what that one can't do, and then all the HR and everything else. My wife asks me every morning, "What's on your plate today?" And I tell her, "I got no idea. I'm not there yet."

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter] Yeah, for sure. And did SB 604 affect y'all at all or y'all just continued working?

David Gott: We just continued on as we were. More than anything it confused the ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] board so much that we were able to kind of ride this thin gray line. And they'd be, like, you can't do that. It's, like, we've got a brewery license. Yeah, we can. They're, like, oh, okay. You can't do that. Sure we can, we've got a restaurant license. We can do that.

Sarah Rodriguez: And ABC was trying to figure out what was going on.

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David Gott: Yeah. They had no idea how to do things or what to do. And all the new business was obviously competition for us so we, like, we're gonna do everything we can, whatever we can get away with to allow us to compete.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

David Gott: So we rode the line here, rode the line there, and still do a little bit here and there.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. That makes sense. [Laughter]

David Gott: The questions I just don't ask 'cause I don't really want to know the answer and I'm afraid if I ask somebody will research it and I'll get one I don't like. So I just let them go on and say, oh, I guess you can do that.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's a risk you run for sure. [Laughter]

David Gott: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: And so what was it like post SB 604, like, before the pandemic? What was that [period 0:30:55] like?

David Gott: That's when it was more like a grenade going off. Every week it was somebody new opening.

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First it was home brewers, many of whom do just fantastic beer. And I can bake a biscuit but I'm not going to open a bakery.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

David Gott: And some of 'em have done a great job and come a long way and done fantastic things and others, you know . . . Beer is like food, and I tell everybody it's, like, oh, they have bad beer. They do not have bad beer, it's not your style, it's not what you like. Some people like asparagus, some people don't. Most people don't like it in their beer but I'm sure there's somebody out there that puts it in their beer somewhere.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

David Gott: 'Cause they're running out of weird things to put into beer these days.

Sarah Rodriguez: There's all kinds of stuff.

David Gott: I have lived around the world. I've traveled fully around the world twice and there's things going into beer today that I've never heard of.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

David Gott: So, yeah. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow. That's wild.

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Could you talk a bit more about folks who kind of came through here, I guess learned the ropes, either learned brewing or the business operations, and then moved on, can you talk a bit about that network, I guess?

David Gott: Yeah. It really drives the distributors crazy 'cause we're all close and the distributors—it's more like the demilitarized zone between distributors. I used to say back in the day when there were five distributors here in the city of Richmond, five old guys that owned them, family had handed them down generation after generation, and I would say if you got those five guys in a room together only one was comin' out alive. None of them liked each other at all. The business was kind of dirty back then too. There was a lot of pressure, and it got a little dirty and to this day you will not catch a Miller guy drinking a Budweiser product and vice versa.

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And that extends to the craft beers they drink. We sell this beer, so I'll drink this beer. The Brown Distributing Company sells that beer, so I won't drink it. And it's very much that way. And we're all different. We're all, like, oh, hey, man. You got something new? What is it? I wanna try it. I don't care who your distributor is. You know, you're my brother in brewing, I want to see what you did. And it kind of drives 'em nuts. It's like, you're supporting the competition. I'm, like, dude, I don't care. It's beer. It's beer. It's what we're about.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right. Right.

David Gott: Yeah, we're all kind of tight. And the fact that so many of us worked together, we acknowledge the great things that each other have done, and I try and remember to call the guys over at Hardywood every so often and say, oh, congratulations, another anniversary.

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Yeah, I think we're all kind of tight enough that we get along and have a good respect for each other in the things we do. Because I think the vast majority of us are in it—I can tell you this, anybody that's in this to make a fortune, they're going to be sorely disappointed. We're in it because we love what we do. We love to be able to meet that guy out on the street who says, oh, I love your shirt, man. I love that beer! And you're, like, thanks! It's a nice business.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm. Very cool. Could you talk a bit about maybe some of the unexpected—I guess because y'all have been around for so long and so much has happened—some unexpected challenges that have popped up that stick out in your head?

David Gott: Well, I mean, the elephant in the room would be COVID obviously.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

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David Gott: Not to be political, but the complete and utter incompetence in the way it was handled, especially here in Richmond. When we're told, hey, you can open back up. And we go out on Thursday, plan to open Friday, and we're trying to do everything we can. It's, like, no, we're not going to have condiments on the table so we're gonna take and we're gonna prep one-ounce, two-ounce ketchups, and we're gonna prep three hundred of 'em because we're gonna be able to open the door and it's gonna be packed. And we find out at midnight, oh, no, you can't

open and now we're sitting there with, like, five hundred ketchups. I came very close to delivering those to the mayor's office. Like, hi, I have no use for these. Maybe you'll find something you can do with it. Things like that. It's always something. It's electricity going out, and it's always something. Big piece of equipment breaks.

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It's industry. People don't really think of beer as industry, but it is, it's manufacturing.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

David Gott: And even for somebody our size they look at us and all they think about is the pub and they don't really know what goes on downstairs and what goes into it. Ideally if we were just pulling in money hand over fist I'd have an electrician and an HVAC guy on staff all the time.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, gosh, yeah.

David Gott: And could probably keep them busy. But it doesn't work that way. [Laughter] Sometimes somebody like me has to go in and go, which breaker am I supposed to close before I work on this? So everybody around here kind of wears a multitude of hats.

Sarah Rodriguez: That makes sense for sure. Speaking of COVID, do you remember what were the early days of that like for y'all?

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David Gott: I don't think miserable is too strong a term. You're trying to come to grips with how you're going to do business. We had never done delivery before. Takeout business was negligible for us. Even take-home beer—people are, like, oh, I get my beer at the store. Don't

think of coming to the restaurant, the brewery, whatever, and getting my beer to take home. But with COVID people wanted to avoid the grocery store and stuff like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: True.

David Gott: And we put a big stack of beer up here and we were, like, oh, my gosh, this works! And so we still have big stacks of beer up here and it's still working. We're still doing a lot of off-premises sales. So if COVID did one thing for us it certainly had people looking at us as a retail outlet for take-home beer, and that's been helpful.

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Food-wise I think we do more takeout now than we used to. But yeah, those days of setting something up outside 'cause people couldn't come inside, having to wire a terminal up to go outside because it was back before we had handhelds—before we did—and things like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah.

David Gott: The hardest part is your core staff and trying to help keep your core staff on and busy.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

David Gott: And your business is down to maybe 7, 8 percent of what you were doing, and you're not really able to pay the bills on that and your staff's not able to pay their bills if they're not working. So yeah, that kind of thing was really hard. I do remember one thing that the general manager up here did at that point. When we started to see things were getting a little wacky he ordered, like, ten cases of toilet paper. So staff members got two rolls a week.

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You could come in and just get a couple rolls ‘cause you couldn’t find it anywhere.

Sarah Rodriguez: You couldn’t, yeah.

David Gott: So we did things like that. We let staff have their shift meals. Even if you weren’t working if you wanted to come in and get a shift meal, we would do that kind of thing. You want to keep your people. They’re the heart of the business.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm. Interesting. Kind of shifting, could you talk about some of the unexpected successes that have kind of happened over your time, any that stand out?

David Gott: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Moments, events.

David Gott: Like I said, back in the day we were delivering ourselves and we were in—well, then it was Safeway and it turned into Martin’s—not Martin’s. Oh, my God, they’ve changed so many times.

0:40:02

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm.

David Gott: Maybe it was Martin’s. [Phone ringing] Excuse me. Let me cut that off. It’s my wife.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you need to take that?

David Gott: No. Turn that down some. We were popular enough that 22-ounce bottles we'd have people pulling four, five, and six off the shelf. So we required a lot of shelf space and a beer facing is how you look at it when you're in a grocery store. I hope I don't ruin buying beer in a grocery store for you. So it's a facing, three bottles. If you're really good you end up with two facings. You go in, you look, and Coors Light will have two facings.

Sarah Rodriguez: But that's what you're aiming for?

David Gott: Yeah. You're trying to expand—because then you also become visible 'cause right now you walk in, you're, like, oh, okay.

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We would have a space like this with our 22s lined up, like, seven deep. I can remember being in one of the grocery stores and there was a brand-new Sam Adams rep, and they were with Loveland Distributing at the time. We were with Brown. Well, actually, we were doing it ourselves then. And he looked at the guy and he said, "Who is this?" And he said, "That's our local brewery." And he said, "God, I hope they never go into six packs." It was, like, yeah! Excellent!

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter] Good sign.

David Gott: Yeah. That was really kind of—I was just going in there to pack the store out. I had not planned on that. So I immediately came back and told everybody. And then, the successes we had when we went into 12-ounce bottles. I think it exploded faster than we expected, which was really kind of neat, too.

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I don't know. The years are filled with the ups and the downs and the things you're, like, man, I never thought that would happen and it's a good thing, or man, I never thought that would happen and it's not a good thing.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

David Gott: It's just the ups and downs of doing business for the most part, I think. I would have to say the people that have been a part of all this through the years is probably the biggest up spot of it all. In twenty-eight years you make a lot of good friends in a business like this so it's kind of neat.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's awesome. And so, speaking of the people, can you talk about how you see, through your work or just kind of Legend in general, engaging with the community? How do y'all do that or how has that happened? What's that been like?

David Gott: Up until recently, maybe the last seven, eight years, Manchester really didn't have much of a community. It was industry and it was a lot of just old houses with older families on the other side who didn't really participate in this side.

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With the vast expansion of residences over here—I want to say we're over six thousand now —

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

David Gott: —community has become a big thing. So the Manchester Alliance met here in this room for years until we outgrew it. I was on the board of the Manchester Alliance for a few years. This is the first year I got off of it. I was, like, look, guys, seven years is enough. They're coming back to meet here. We'll be using the beer garden. They want to meet here in the

summer, but we just can't fit sixty people in here and we routinely have forty to sixty people at these meetings now. So we've been a part of that. Thursday is Manchester Mug Day.

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We have mugs made and if you live or work here in the neighborhood we will give you a mug. You take it home and on Thursday you come back and it's \$3.50 to fill up on one of our regular tier one beers. The whole idea being you're sitting here with your mug, you see somebody else with a mug, and you walk up, you start talking to 'em, find out they live in the same apartment building or around the corner or work somewhere. So the idea is kind of to get the community in here networking.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's good.

David Gott: We host the Manchester cleanup with the Alliance. Our first cleanup will be next month, the second Saturday of every month. I use my old pickup truck and we donate the bags and the pickers. We meet here at eleven o'clock in the morning and everybody goes out and picks up trash for a couple hours. They leave the bags out, text me, tell me where the bags are.

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I pick 'em up, throw 'em in our dumpster. So we do that every month.

Sarah Rodriguez: Every month?

David Gott: Yeah. And we provide T-shirts 'cause if we're gonna do all that work we want to be sure people know who the heck is sponsoring it.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter] For sure.

David Gott: And local businesses get involved too. We do a raffle every time we do it so local businesses will be a sponsor and donate raffle items, gift cards, things like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, very cool. Very cool.

David Gott: Yeah, we try to be very engaged. With parking being the way it is and is going to be we know that the neighborhood is our bread and butter as far as the pub is concerned so we want to be very tight with that.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. Do y'all engage with the folks with the James River at all?

David Gott: Oh, yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me about that?

David Gott: Yep. We did a beer the beginning of last year called The Raging James Pilsner and donated proceeds.

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The James River Park System has so many different organizations involved with it. It's the Friends of the James River that raises funds to do the trail work, and then there's the James River cleanup crew, then there's the invasive species crew who are the most interesting by far because they go down with goats and have the goats eat the kudzu and stuff.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow!

David Gott: And then pack the goats up and come up here and have beers. And sometimes they'll let the goats out in the parking lot and the goats will be walking around all fat bellies from

eating kudzu all day long. And of course, the kids love it. They think it's the most wonderful thing in the world.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

David Gott: We're involved with the SPCA. We are actually in the process of brewing this year's beer. We donate a package every year and they auction it off. Basically, you win the bid, and your pet goes on a can of beer.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, okay.

David Gott: And we got two French bulldogs right now so we're doing two beers because the owner of Moore Subaru, he and his wife purchased the package and they've got two dogs and he likes pilsners, and she likes IPAs. They're, like, I've got two dogs and—and the dogs were named after their mothers. So it's, like, we can't really dis one mother-in-law. And he's, like, I want my wife to be happy so you gotta make an IPA, but I'd really like a pilsner. So we're doing two beers for them.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

David Gott: So that'll be coming out—we'll be having a big party up here the first weekend of May for them and get the beer out and it's always big. We've been doing this for four years now, maybe five. The highest it's gone is somebody paid \$15,000 for it. And so that was \$15,000 that went to the SPCA.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. Wow.

David Gott: And then, we do the beer. We try to stay as engaged as possible.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. That's cool, especially the idea of the animals on the beer.

[Laughter] Could you tell me a bit more about the kind of brewing operation, how that has changed over time? 'Cause you do everything in-house, right?

David Gott: Yep, um-hm.

Sarah Rodriguez: How has that evolved?

David Gott: We started off with a ten-barrel system. It's a little copper bohemian system and we were riding that thing ragged like an old Volkswagen. We ended up brewing three times a day and, as I said, as places changed and went out of business we bought up equipment, put in a thirty-barrel system, so suddenly we could do three times the amount of beer in one brew. We had to buy a bunch of tanks and we were hampered by a low ceiling down there so a brewery our size would normally have a lot fewer tanks than we've got.

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But we've got a thirty-barrel system and we can fit a thirty-barrel fermenter or a thirty-barrel upright tank down there and it just fits.

Sarah Rodriguez: You can't really go much more than that.

David Gott: Yeah. Normally you'd want, like, a ninety-barrel tank and you'd brew three brews and pop it in there and ferment it out. We do a one brew, one tank and it's a little unorthodox but it works. So we've got, like, forty-three active tanks down there right now.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

David Gott: We do twenty beers. When we started we did four. I want to say we've got, like, five people on the actual brewing staff. Then we've got the brewery manager and the assistant brewery manager who also—she runs the canning line—

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she just went through here a second ago—who started with us as a waitress. And yeah, a lot of folks have come through downstairs. We have a new office manager. Our old office manager left. She started here as a host when she moved to Richmond. And the office manager we have now moved to Richmond and started here as part of the wait staff. So we like to try and hire in-house, move people up. So a total of twelve people on the brew staff and then up here I've got three managers, and kitchen—good Lord, I don't know, that changes every day. I have a hard time getting to know them they come and they go so fast. And then, front of the house it's gonna get warm so we're gonna start building the front of the house staff.

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I think we average somewhere around fifty employees over the course if you go month by month. But the core staff downstairs, the twelve people downstairs, just the brew staff alone, the five guys on the brew staff, myself, the owner, and the two brewery managers, that's a hundred and fifty years of brewing experience in this building.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's cool.

David Gott: I've been here twenty-six years and there are three guys downstairs who've been here longer than I have.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, really?

David Gott: So yeah, you've got a hundred years right there in just us.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. Yeah.

David Gott: And then, I think the newest guy we've got in the brewery right now, other than the assistant brew manager, been here sixteen years.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Lot of longevity.

David Gott: Yeah. It's a core group and we work pretty well together. We're able to cover for each other, able to back up each other's positions. There's nobody here that has to leave for vacation and be worried. There's always somebody here that goes, no, no, I'll get it. So that's kind of nice to have that kind of confidence in a staff that works that well together and is that professional and that confident.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, for sure.

David Gott: You don't see that in a lot of places, especially these days. Good Lord.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm. And so what is your day-to-day looking like right now?

David Gott: Right now?

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, typically?

David Gott: It's looking like about a half a beer into going for another beer, but I have an appointment at, like, 3:30 so I can't do it.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter] Yeah.

David Gott: Right now we're in that first quarter where we're still trying to get things set up for the entire year.

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Unfortunately, things have gotten to the point with chain stores and stuff where we literally right now should be looking at what we're gonna do next year.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, wow.

David Gott: Some of the chains will start their reset process for next spring in June and I have to know what we're going to be pushing in that never-ending quest to get more space in the grocery store. That's one thing that has happened with the business is there's much more minutia that you've got to think about.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah.

David Gott: And then, there's all the government compliance. It's not like we have an HR department. That's a hat that the office manager and I pass back and forth. You name it, it's like running three businesses and it's like running all the operations of three businesses.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, for sure. What do you think then at this point do you see kind of for the future of your work, future of Legend, future of the industry, if you're seeing any patterns?

David Gott: I've stopped trying to guess what's going to happen. I've been very right in some instances. I've been very wrong in some instances. Culturally, demographically, things are

changing so rapidly, and I might wake up tomorrow morning and half the country might decide, you know what, we're giving up alcohol. Saw it on TV, sounds like a great idea. I have no idea. I have no earthly idea what's gonna happen. We try and plan and I almost guarantee you that anybody being honest with you in the industry will tell you the same thing.

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Right now we are all looking at what's going on with stores and it's what they're calling the RTDs, the ready-to-drinks.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm.

David Gott: America has gotten so lazy that they can't even mix their own drink, they have to buy it in a can from a store. It's very depressing. But again, we saw that with—you're too young to remember—wine coolers, Bartles & Jaymes. And you go in the store, take everything out of the box, we gotta make room for this new thing that's going to revolutionize the way people drink. And you go back six months later and pull it all back out. And then next year somebody comes up with something else new, and then somebody reinvents the wheel and says, oh, no, these aren't wine coolers, these are malternatives which means that the big breweries can make 'em now. And you pull everything out of the box, put those in, and you come back six months later and pull everything out of the box and replace 'em. And then it's clear beers and ice beers and red beers.

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It was actually really funny—this was a lot of years ago—Killian's Red was a pretty big deal and that was made by Coors so Miller Brewing Company and Anheuser-Busch both were, like, eh,

maybe we should think about somethin'. And for some reason Miller Brewing Company came out with a beer called Red Dog and, of course, AB knew it was in the works so AB's, like, crap, we gotta make a red beer. So they made a beer called Red Wolf. Only Miller's beer wasn't red, it was just another beer, and it was called Red Dog. And the politics around that were just kind of hysterical. Miller felt like, oh, we really weren't trying to get one over on 'em but, ha ha, we did. And AB was, like, how do they fool us like that? They never really planned on making a red beer to begin with.

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So it's really odd sometimes when things like that happen. But yeah, it's kind of interesting to sit back and watch 'cause we're not in the fray when it comes to the big guys, and they decide what they're gonna do to be a super-premium beer versus their budget beer versus this versus that. And so just kind of watch what they do, we're, like, man, this is our beer, and this is what we charge for it.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

David Gott: Don't have focus groups and stuff. My focus group sits at that bar every day.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's fair. That's fair. And so what do you see for Legend kind of coming up?

David Gott: I'll answer that question when all the construction's done.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's a good point. That's a very good point.

David Gott: This has been hard over here and they're doing it over here. And we had three delivery trucks the other day that were stuck in the lot because they couldn't pull up here because of the way things were parked.

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And the first one unloaded and he couldn't get out. He had to wait for the other two to unload and then all three of them had to back out. So it's the logistics of it all with all this construction. And when they start this one it's really gonna be bad because they use that parking lot as a staging area and then they start building on it, that's gone. So hopefully these townhomes—these are \$800,000 townhomes—hopefully they'll be done by then. So at least we won't have that construction to worry about, but we'll have this. And then there's a seventeen-story building in the works for down there, which, I think, traffic-wise won't be quite as impactful because they got a lot of room to move around down there. But noise and, you name it, everything else, I just have no idea how that kind of thing is likely to impact us.

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I jokingly say we're going to market it as dinner and a show, come out and watch 'em move steel beams around. The guys will like it, I guess. I don't know.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

David Gott: Until the construction is done—like I said, COVID was very rough, and we just never got to that point where, all right, COVID is over and everything's back to normal because all this started. So yeah, it's really kind of this mishmash of when are they gonna be done and when are they gonna start? And then, what about them and on and on.

Sarah Rodriguez: How connected are y'all with any of that planning? Is it connected to the neighborhood?

David Gott: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And that's one of the reasons I've stayed on the Manchester Alliance for a lot of years is so I would know what's going on and then could react.

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I'd like to say I've got a pretty good relationship with the neighbors, and I know everybody on the board 'cause I was on the board for years. We've got a brand-new board now but still some of those folks that I've worked with are still on it. Got a very good relationship with the city, I think. They're politicians. You don't know whether you can really believe you have a good relationship with them or not. [Laughter] But our city councilwoman and her liaison, Tavares Floyd, has been an incredible help for us. And they will come to us and say, hey, this is kinda in the works. What do you think? How is this going to affect you? So I feel like we've got the relationships and we've got the support. It's really just the logistics of what physically goes on that is gonna be the telltale sign.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Sure.

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And I guess to kind of wrap up, just curious, do you have a favorite beer that y'all have done or a couple favorite beers that y'all have done that you particularly like?

David Gott: It's hard to say. I like a lot of them that we've done. I tend to drink lager. It's generally the lowest alcohol beer we've got and it's kind of smart to keep your wits while you're here. Don't want to do anything stupid or say anything stupid. So I tend to stick to lager but I'm

not—and this will probably get me kicked off the air—I’m not an IPA guy. I don’t mind some of the IPAs, but IPAs are just done to death and a lot like Belgian beers domestically, Belgian style of beers, I think, just taken to the brink of insanity almost, I think.

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I have picked up IPAs in places and been, like, I feel like I just emptied the cat’s litterbox.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

David Gott: That’s kinda what it smells like. Hops can be pungent. And it’s still a huge thing, pushing it and pushing it. One of the beers we came out with this year that is really not something we normally would do but the distributors were saying, you need to do this, and it’s an imperial IPA. Fortunately, it’s not that super dry, bitter IPA, it’s more fruity, but it’s 9.9 percent and it’s a 19.2 ounce can, and the reason they want it is they said that’s where convenience stores are going. I was, like, you mean, the stores that have gas stations? They’re, like, yeah, 19.2 is selling like wildfire in these stores.

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

David Gott: That does not make me feel good. [Laughter]

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So yeah, there are a lot of interesting little things like that that aren’t part of what’s known outside, I guess.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Sure.

David Gott: Whereas sometimes you shake your head and go this makes no sense at all, but if it's what people want it's what they want.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. Yeah. Were there any special—you mentioned some special occasion beers. Any in particular that either you really liked or y'all kind of tried it and were, like, well, that didn't work?

David Gott: Oh, there have been more than a few of those.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

David Gott: Again, with beer, your taste buds are different. There are people who just want that strong, bitter IPA and there are people who want that really malty kinda scotch ale and there are people who love them all. And I tend to love pretty much all of them. I've kinda gotten off the Belgian beer. I eat a banana every morning. It's supposed to be healthy. I don't particularly care for bananas that much, but I don't drink Belgian beers 'cause I don't want a banana in my beer.

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That's what some of 'em taste like. But yeah, I think for the most part your average beer drinker, and I think we do a pretty good job of having a well-rounded selection with not a lot that's way, way over the top. We do a Belgian tripel. It's pretty strong and pretty spicy and pretty banana-y. I'm just not a fan. It's a great beer and it sells like crazy. Hefeweizen styles. We do a little bit of everything, and I think that helps with the bar 'cause when somebody comes in our bartender is not like, what kind of IPA do you want 'cause that's what I've got is IPAs? So I think we have

such a well-rounded selection and wide variety of beers and almost all of them are classic styles or at least a take on a classic style. And we actually call them what they are.

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Sarah Rodriguez: That's helpful.

David Gott: Somebody says, I'm gonna get you a Train to Hell and you're, like, um, so is that a light beer or is that a double stout or what is that? So yeah, when you come in you're, like, oh, look, a pilsner. Yay! You can get a pilsner. So we try and keep it so that people know what they're getting, and we try and keep the alcohol contents at a reasonable level for the style, so you don't order a pilsner and it ends up being like an 8 percent imperial pilsner or something like that.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you kind of know what you're getting into.

David Gott: Yeah, you know what you're getting yourself into when you order one.

Sarah Rodriguez: Um-hm. That makes sense. Well, that's most of the questions I have. Is there anything I didn't ask about? Anything you didn't mention you want to mention?

David Gott: No. I think that's pretty thorough. Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Awesome. All right. Well, thank you.

David Gott: It was fun.

[End]