



From left to right:
Les Stewart, Woody
Lockwood and Chris
Powers



With four locations and hundreds of flavors in its repertoire, Raleigh-based Trophy Brewing has earned its ardent fans



FIRST PLACE

by CATHERINE CURRIN

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Chris Powers and Woody Lockwood met bartending and serving on Glenwood South. “In the early 2000s, we worked at what was then Bogart’s American Grill, and stayed in touch as we continued to different restaurants and bars around town,” says Powers. At the time, in their opinion, Raleigh’s beer selection was lacking overall—most restaurants carried the same handful of beers, in part due to the cap on alcohol by volume (ABV) in North Carolina, which led to a lack of variety in styles and flavors. “When the alcohol cap was lifted, the floodgates opened. People hadn’t tried many of these unique beers before,” says Lockwood, referring to the 2005 “Pop the Cap” movement that permitted beers above 4.9 percent ABV to be sold in North Carolina. The duo began to try any beer they could get their hands on, getting excited about unique styles coming in from reps around the country.

After years of tasting brews in other people’s bars, they decided to open their own. Busy Bee Cafe opened on S. Wilmington



Street in 2009, complete with one of downtown’s only rooftops. Part of the mission was to offer the unique beers they thought the community had been missing. “We were seeing other breweries in other states going above 4.9 percent ABV for years,” says Powers. “When we opened our bar we wanted to work with other local breweries and challenge them to make new beers.” Powers and Lockwood provided low-risk brewing opportunities for their friends at local breweries: If they wanted a tequila-aged IPA on tap at Busy Bee, they’d provide the barrel and commit to purchasing all of the beer. “We wanted to see what they could do without the risk,” says Lockwood.

After a few years of slinging beers made by others, Lockwood and Powers decided that they wanted to control the production and make their own beer. “We realized we could make the beer exactly what we wanted,” says Powers, “and around 2011 we started looking around, thinking about what our brewery would be like.” In 2013, Powers and Lockwood co-founded Trophy Brewing along with David Meeker, brought on Les Stewart as Chief Brewing Officer and got to work—since inception, Trophy has canned and kegged over 500 different beer varieties.

And what about the name? Lockwood says that he and Powers

fell in love with the bright red building on W. Davie Street that was home to Mort’s Trophies and Awards. The two joke that the shop was never intending to sell, but they always loved the idea of a brewery within the wood paneling, turf carpeting and trophies lining the walls. “When downtown was still quiet and we only had Busy Bee, we would walk around to check out other spots,” says Lockwood. “We always loved that building and thought

about how we would love to have a brewery in there.” Although Trophy never opened in the bright red building, the theme stuck, and now every tap handle is an old-school trophy, many of which are donated. In the early days,

“Beer and food should be celebrated together just like food and wine,” says Powers.

Powers and Lockwood collected trophies as a way to serve beer. “At our events before opening, we would say: ‘come taste our beer—bring us a trophy and we’ll give you a sample for free.’ People would show up with boxes of them.” Powers says that the community was thrilled to put their dusty trophies to use.

Fast-forward a few years, and Trophy’s domain is vast, touching most points of downtown Raleigh, beginning on Morgan Street and rounding out on Maywood Avenue. Each of the four locations across downtown are distinctly their own, with a loyal following and a unique take on cuisine. The pair say that incorpo-



Chief Brewing
Officer Les Stewart
at Trophy's brewing
facility on Maywood
Avenue.





rating food into the beer-tasting experience was something they were sure on from the beginning. “Beer and food should be celebrated together just like food and wine,” says Powers. “People sometimes forget that beer can be paired.” State of Beer, for instance, the brewery’s bottle shop on Hillsborough Street, is as much beloved for its beer selection as it is for the to-die-for sandwiches with ghost pepper salami or housemade pimento cheese. That location opened in 2015 to offer cans and bottles from all over the U.S., not just their own brews, to be enjoyed on community tables facing the bustle of Hillsborough Street. Powers and Lockwood describe State of Beer as Trophy’s ‘neutral ground.’ “We have so many relationships with other brands, we didn’t want it to be just the Trophy shop,” says Powers. “It’s fun for us because it has all of the beer that we want to drink. It’s not the biggest selection, but it’s the best.”

The former Busy Bee Cafe was transformed into Trophy Tap + Table in 2016, to celebrate their own beer in a taproom setting alongside elevated pub fare, while the main brewing facility and tasting room on Maywood Avenue (Trophy Brewing + Taproom) rotates in local food trucks. Trophy is unique in its rapid expansion across Raleigh, and the neighborhoods they’ve rooted in have grown and prospered. Powers jokes that Trophy locations have always opened in whatever space they could afford. “South Wilmington Street was totally different when we got here in 2009,” he says. “And we didn’t go into Morgan Street thinking we would expand to a production facility, we thought we’d have plenty of beer for a while.”

The approach in their brewing method has also been unconventional. Visit any of Trophy’s locations and you’ll likely discover a new beer on tap—but it probably won’t be available for long. Only two beers are constant: Trophy Wife, a light, session IPA, and Cloud Surfer, a modern IPA. Others rotate seasonally (you may see a recurrence of Trophy Husband, a witbier, and Milky Way, a salted caramel stout), but most are one-time brews. “We want to take advantage of all of the awesome produce that we have in North Carolina, follow trends and try new things, but we also want to have a few things that people can count on,” says Powers. Stewart, who learned the ropes of brewing with his extensive at-home operation, says the trio was most excited about the experimentation that comes with craft beer. “We are really able to think outside the box in terms of the ingredients and process involved in beer.” The brewing team is certainly flexing their creativity: they brewed over 80 different beers in 2018 alone.

The original brewing facility and restaurant location opened on Morgan Street in 2013. Trophy Brewing + Pizza serves funky pie combinations on a casual patio plus a small interior. Trophy’s planning to take over the rest of the building by 2020 to create more seating inside and out, plus add an event space. The expanded location will also allow for a portion of beer production to move back to where it began, specifically expanding their sour program. Stewart says he loves working with sour beers because “you’re dealing with a science that isn’t fully understood.” The Morgan Street facility will increase Trophy’s sour production



from 1 to 8 percent of the overall beer production, most of which will be served at that location. “We have a knowledge base to take that program and expand it exponentially at Morgan Street,” says Stewart. Stewart also says that they’ll continue experimenting at the main brewery on some upcoming brews that they’re cranking out at Maywood, including a specialty lager. “We’re really excited about rolling out a delicate lager that we’ve been working on. We have horizontal fermentation tanks that are specifically designed to produce lagers.”

In the last two years, Trophy produced one million cans and the numbers are only going up. “This year we’re on pace to do about 6,000 barrels worth of production,” says Powers. “We started off on Morgan Street with 200 barrels.” And while the scale of barrels is massive, most of this beer is staying local. Trophy only sends beers out of state for special events and will occasionally drop off cases and kegs to their buddies in Charlotte. You can also find them in and around Wilmington for the summer. While they’re intentionally keeping distribution local, Trophy incorporates collaborations with brewers around the country into its production, like an IPA with Hi-Wire in Asheville or a pilsner with Captain Lawrence in New York (Powers and Lockwood say they

have always idolized the NY brewers). They see it as a way to support other breweries, learn something new and have a little fun, too. “It’s all about connecting with other brands,” says Powers. “We collaborate with friends outside the market a lot.”

Beyond collaborating geographically, Trophy has also joined forces with locals like Dix Park, Arrow Haircuts and Oak City Cycling to develop specialty and celebratory beers. These collaborations often include a charitable component, something that

Powers and Lockwood say they feel strongly about supporting. “It’s something we’re passionate about, and we want to give back as much as possible,” says Powers. The brewery has teamed up with all kinds of organizations, from the Food Bank of Central & Eastern NC to the ACLU, with a portion of the

proceeds from these beers donated to the nonprofit. Powers notes that when you support an organization openly on a beer can, it’s instant marketing for a cause. The duo says they hope to continue partnerships with organizations that they believe in. “At the beginning, we were a little conservative: you’re scared to put your voice out there,” says Lockwood. “More recently we’ve gotten more comfortable in our own skin, and standing up for what we believe in.”

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