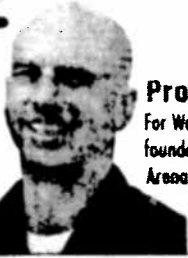


RBJ



Profile
For Workinman Interactive founder and CEO Jason Area, business is fun and games.
Page 10

Special Report
The Rochester area is catching up to the nationwide trend of mixed-use development.
Page 15



Snap Poll
Readers sound off on Donald Trump's candidacy for president.
Page 38

VOLUME 31, NUMBER 18

WWW.RBJDAILY.COM

JULY 31, 2015

Return journey

RMSC might help bring the passenger pigeon back from extinction

By SALLY PARKER

When the last surviving passenger pigeon died in captivity in 1914, her body packed on ice and shipped to the Smithsonian Institution, no one could have imagined scientists would one day try to bring the species back to life.

But that is happening in a laboratory in California, and Rochester Museum & Science Center is playing a role. A team of scientists at the University of California Santa Cruz is using old bones from RMSC and other institutions to bring the passenger pigeon back from extinction.

The project, one of several in the emerging field of de-extinction, is called the Great Passenger Pigeon

Continued on page 14



RMSC director of collections George McIntosh: "What sounded like science fiction in 1950 is common today." Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Building photonic future

Cooperation and history deliver a winning bid

By KERRY FELTNER

It's like 1975 in Silicon Valley.

That is the atmosphere in Rochester now, said Joel Seligman, president of the University of Rochester.

The feeling comes on the heels of this week's announcement by Vice President Joe Biden naming Rochester as the new hub for the American Institute of Manufacturing Photonics.

"We're going to see over time a dramatic amplification of the focus on photonics going forward," Seligman said. "This is like being in Silicon Valley in 1975 or 1980. It was starting to move; nobody really knew how far it would go."

Rochester beat out others nationwide to become the sixth of nine public-private partnerships in the National Network of Manufacturing Institutes, which was started back in March 2012.

Continued on page 13

Study tackles outlook for an arts center

By NATE DOUGHERTY

After two previous downtown performing arts center projects were derailed by a stalled development and an unexpected administrative change, Arnold Rothschild is optimistic the third time is the charm.

The chairman of the Rochester Broadway Theatre League Inc. said he is confident the latest attempt to study the idea of putting a performing arts center within the city of Rochester can have a different result than past attempts. This month, Rochester City Council gave the go-ahead on a performing arts center site and facility study—one that draws in two national leaders in the field as consultants.

The \$211,000 study will be funded in

Continued on page 14

Company grows from a backyard hunch

Iron Smoke Whiskey adds investors and plans for expansion in Fairport

By KERRY FELTNER

Four years ago musician Tommy Brunett wanted to try combining whiskey and backyard barbecue smoke.

Today, he's running Iron Smoke Whiskey LLC, an operation that is primed to be cash-flow positive in 2016.

"I had a thought that wouldn't it be great if you combined whiskey and backyard BBQ smoke, two great Americana pastimes," Brunett said.

The firm has two products—Apple Wood Iron Smoke Whiskey and Rattlesnake Rosie's Apple Pie Whiskey—that are in high demand across the state.

"It's rewarding to see it literally come from an idea on a napkin or glass inside a smoker to a product that is rec-



Tommy Brunett, center, and Stephen Brown, far right, are co-founders of the firm. Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

ognized by whiskey blogs," said Stephen Brown, co-founder and a majority owner of the business.

When the firm started in 2011 the three owners were Brunett, Brown and Daniel Lynch. Today, the company's structure is more complex.

Brunett and Brown are majority owners along with Ronald Kirshner—chief

of Cardiac Services and Cardiothoracic Surgery at Rochester Regional Health—who bought out Lynch's share.

As of January the company added 24 stakeholders to the structure of the firm. The investors include Cranberry Capital Partners Inc.'s Arunas Chesonis, founding partner of Cranberry Capital, and Keith Wilson, managing partner of the investment firm.

The distillery operates on Parce Avenue in Fairport

in a 10,000-square-foot facility that once was American Can Co., which opened in the early 20th century. Another 5,000 square feet of the facility is planned for expansion in 2016.

The building houses equipment including a 1,000-gallon stripping still, a 250-gallon pot still and a smoker with

Continued on page 38

IRON SMOKE

Continued from page 1

450 pounds of grain capacity. The operation has 70 tons of grain storage and 4,000 gallons of fermentation capacity on the premises.

Originally the thought was to contract distill its recipe, but demand quickly outstripped supply.

"Ultimately, we ended up having to build a distillery so we could control our own destiny," Brown said.

The owners invested \$1.2 million into renovating the space, including permanent building upgrades that were around \$100,000. Estimating the company will do \$250,000 in sales this year, he expects sales to top \$1 million in 2016.

The business has the ability to produce 2,000 cases, or 12,000 bottles, per month. It has been producing some 1,200 cases, or 7,200 bottles, per month. There is the equivalent of 6,500 cases aging in barrels, officials said.

Expanding distribution

New York City is the next step for distribution.

"From a branding standpoint we cannot move Iron Smoke downstate until we have the volume to support it," Brown said.

"Our goal is to get over 500 cases a month, which is our even-out positive point and then anything beyond that we're reinvesting in growth and determining what markets we need to get into," Brown said. "Because we have some really exciting potential markets."

Major markets such as Austin, Texas; Los Angeles; Miami; Boston; and Washington, D.C., are among the areas they plan to expand to eventually, officials said.

"We're purists and we don't add anything to our whiskey, and I think that's what's going to make our longevity better because we didn't cut corners," Brunett said. "We don't make gin and vodka and everything else."

Mike Calabrese, owner of Good Luck Restaurant and Cure Restaurant, has been a client of Iron Smoke since the distillery was founded in 2011.

"There's no question it (the whiskey) is very high quality," he said. "Tommy is a very smart businessman, he's home-grown, and he's a great Rochesterian. He's making it happen; he's very passionate about it. He's very serious about it and it really shows in the product. The quality of it is top-notch for itself."



"I had a thought that wouldn't it be great if you combined whiskey and backyard BBQ smoke, two great Americana pastimes," says Tommy Brunett, center. With him, from left, are Larry Currier, Drew Wescott, Stephen Brown and Corey Vance.

"When you have a quality product people find out, people talk about it and then they're on board," he added.

Iron Smoke Whiskey is a sustainability-focused company. Farmers are given the spent grains of the whiskey production to feed their animals.

"In a sense, from grain to spent grains, which go back to the farmers, to repurposing heads and tails to make Rattlesnake Rosie's, we have very little waste in our process," Brown said. "We're effectively using 100 percent of the corn and wheat in some fashion. From an ear of corn and a stalk of wheat we get two types of whiskey and feed animals."

There are five staffers, including Brunett, with a plan to add a handful next year to keep pace with production.

Company leaders

Brown continues to be the managing director of investments for Stifel, Nicolaus & Co. Inc.—a financial firm with headquarters in St. Louis. He works in the firm's Fairport branch. He previously worked for Merrill Lynch for 23 years as part of its Bank of America Corp.'s private investment group.

Brunett, a native of Webster, has owned marketing firm Sixteen Ton LLC for eight years. The business has worked with the likes of Virgin Group Ltd., Turner Broadcasting System, Sony Corp., Public Broadcasting Service and the musician Kid Rock. Brunett is a singer and

songwriter who plays with the self-titled Tommy Brunett Band—in his free time. In the 1980s he was the touring guitarist for the U.K.-based band Modern English.

"All the work we've done our whole lives—it's got to be the best—I've got to beat anything we did for anybody else along the path," Brunett said. "We want to make this a textbook success."

All facets of production, including labeling and marketing, are done in-house. The company's long-term vision is factored in, clients say.

"They handle themselves in a very professional (way)," said Don Bombace, owner of Farmington, Ontario County-based Bombace Wine & Spirits Inc. "They're looking at the very big picture and it's quite impressive the way they've created it. They're covering all the bases with the way you should present and create a product."

The firm likes to work on local projects. Upcoming events include the Greentopia Festival, a collaboration with the Genesee Brew House, and a boutique in Record Archive Inc. to showcase the company's apparel.

"The good surprise is I never thought it would happen so fast and furious and far reaching," Brunett said. "We have a lot of pride in the Finger Lakes and supporting local agriculture and supporting people's families."

The current products include Apple Wood Smoked Whiskey and Rattlesnake

Rosie's Apple Pie Whiskey. The first four batches—5,796 bottles—of Apple Wood Smoked Whiskey sold out. Rattlesnake Rosie's first batch sold out in February.

Rattlesnake Rosie's won a bronze medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition—regarded as one of the country's largest and most important international spirits competitions—in March, beating out over 1,500 international contenders.

"The key to any distilling business in my mind is the reorders," Brown said. "Anybody will buy something once because they think it's a cool label or it sounds good."

Although competition is growing in the market, Iron Smoke Whiskey can hold its own, officials said. The term "craft" does not have the same meaning for every distillery, Brown said.

"Competition is good, especially at this point in the market," Brown said. "It's nowhere near saturated."

Entering its fifth year of operation in 2016, the business is gaining momentum. Crafting quality whiskey is what drives the owners, Brunett says.

"This is like rock and roll—we joke we're not making Bibles, we're making whiskey, so it affords us to be a little more out there," he said. "It's a lifestyle. A lot of other distilleries will make vodka and gin to get by; we're sticking with what we love."

Photo by Kimberly McKinzie