

ORAL HISTORY

THIS PAGE and OPPOSITE:  
Scenes from Hardywood Park Craft  
Brewery in Richmond, VA

# WHAT'S BREWING IN RICHMOND?

SFA documents the stories behind the suds.

ORAL HISTORIES BY SARAH I. RODRIGUEZ  
PHOTOS BY PARKER MICHELS-BOYCE

CRAFT BEER HAS EXPLODED IN POPULARITY IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, IN RECENT YEARS. But the Virginia capital's relationship with beer goes back much farther: The first canned beer in the United States, a test run by Kreuger Brewing Company of New Jersey, went on sale in Richmond in January 1935. A few generations later, the Richmond beer scene exploded when the state moved to allow retail sales and on-site consumption at breweries in 2012. A wave of newcomers joined the city's few existing breweries in opening taprooms and adjoining restaurants. ¶ Through the growth and competition of the last decade, and in spite of the difficult Covid years, Richmond brewers overwhelmingly describe a close-knit, collegial local industry that supports and roots for the success of its peers. Through thirteen oral history interviews, SFA's Tapping into Richmond Beer project captures a snapshot of the city's brewing community. Read on to learn more about four of those brewers.

## KATE LEE

Kate Lee is the president of Hardywood Park Craft Brewery, Richmond's second-oldest operating brewery. While in college, Kate developed an interest in the brewing process during a food science class on fermentation. She went on to have a twelve-year career at Anheuser-Busch, first in the quality department and then as assistant brewmaster at the Williamsburg, Virginia, brewery. After meeting Hardywood Park Craft Brewery co-founders Eric McKay and Patrick Murtaugh, she joined the Hardywood team as the quality assurance director in 2014. Lee's passion for her work is obvious; she is the kind of scientist who likens working with new strains of yeast to "meeting new friends." Not only did she develop Hardywood's quality program, but through the Virginia Craft Brewers Guild, she educates other brewers in the state about the importance of quality assurance and safety. In 2022, Lee became the president of Hardywood. Though she's less involved in day-to-day brewing in this role, she proudly name-checks the Virginia farms from which Hardywood sources ingredients like raspberries, ginger, honey, and malt—and she still gets excited when she sees customers line up for Hardywood's annual release of Gingerbread Stout.

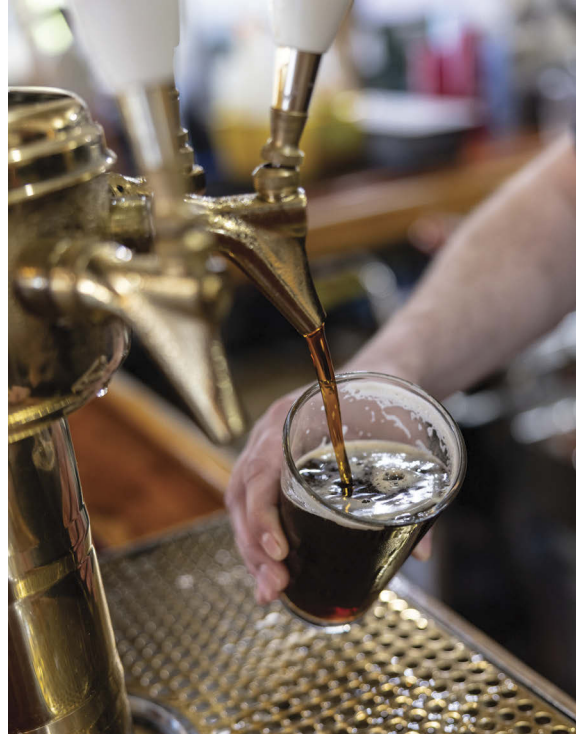


Dave Gott of Legend Brewing Company in Richmond, VA



## DAVID GOTT

David “Dave” Gott is the operations manager for Legend Brewing Company in Richmond’s Manchester neighborhood. A native Richmonder, Gott first learned about beer from working at the Fan Market in high school and college. He worked in beer distribution before making the move to brewing. Gott joined Legend Brewing Company in 1996, when the brewery existed only as a small basement tasting room. At that time, Manchester was an industrial neighborhood, and many of the bar’s regulars worked at a nearby tinfoil factory. Now, a new apartment complex with more than a hundred units is going up across the street. Gott hopes to see Legend serve as a hub for the growing Manchester community, just as it has for Richmond’s brewing industry. Many of the city’s brewers learned their craft at Legend, and Gott remembers them all. “In twenty-eight years, you make a lot of good friends in a business like this,” he says.



Scenes from The Answer Brewpub in Richmond, VA, including its game room with vintage pinball machines.





## AN BUI

An Bui is the chief beer officer at Richmond's Mekong restaurant and chief beer operator at The Answer Brewpub. Born in South Vietnam in 1974, Bui moved to Richmond with two of his older brothers in 1985. Their parents joined them in 1992, and the family opened Mekong, a Vietnamese restaurant, in 1995. Bui began to curate an offering of Belgian beers that complemented the flavors on Mekong's menu. Gradually, he educated patrons about craft beer, and the restaurant's beer list grew to include domestic craft brews. Through those one-on-one interactions, Bui built a loyal customer base for his family's restaurant. At the same time, he was helping the local craft beer industry by educating palates and converting supporters. Encouraged by the growth of Richmond's brewery scene after 2012, Bui opened The Answer Brewpub next door to Mekong in 2014. He's been at it for so long now that he's now serving a second generation of Mekong diners and beer connoisseurs. And his early dream of Richmond becoming "a tiny dot on a beer map one day" has more than come true.





## ERIC JACKSON

---

Eric Jackson is the president and founder of Capsoul Brewing Collective. A lifelong creative and a longtime hospitality professional, Jackson began blogging about beer while working in hotels in Georgia. Once he moved to Richmond in 2019, the blog evolved into Capsoul Collective, a social media business with a mission to cultivate diversity and inclusion in the Richmond beer scene. With a small team, Capsoul soon expanded from a magazine and podcast to a pop-up brewer and event host. They produced Cohesion, a double IPA, to commemorate and encourage unity in Richmond in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning of 2020. At pop-up events and brewery collaboration across the city, Jackson loves to help beer-reluctant drinkers find a style they love. Now, he and the Capsoul team are working to open a brick-and-mortar location. When they do, it will be Richmond's first Black-owned brewery. 🍻

---

*Visit [southernfoodways.org](https://southernfoodways.org) to explore the rest of the Tapping into Richmond Beer oral history project, part of SFA's archive of more than 1,000 oral history interviews.*

THIS PAGE: From left, Eric Jackson, CM Bryant, and Darryl Puller of Capsoul Brewing Collective in Richmond, VA; OPPOSITE, TOP to BOTTOM: Jackson with customers at a beer release; Jackson samples a Capsoul beer brewed in collaboration with The Answer.

