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FemAle Brew Fest moves to new beachfront location as event grows



Image: Mary Beth Koeth

Frances Antonio Martineau, founder of FemAle Brew Fest.

MARY BETH KOETH

By [Dina Katgara](#) - , South Florida Business Journal
Aug 13, 2024 **Updated** Aug 14, 2024 10:53am EDT



Fort Lauderdale's 8th annual [FemAle Brew Fest](#) on Sept. 14 is expanding to a new beachfront location at Las Olas Oceanside Park.

Craft beer enthusiast Frances Antonio-Martineau started the self-funded festival in 2017 to uplift female craft beer brewers. Since then, it has grown from a small warehouse with 15 breweries to an event with about 2,500 attendees and over 40 breweries across the country, including South Florida breweries like Funky Buddha, Tripping Animals, and J Wakefield Brewing.

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"My favorite part each year is seeing everybody come together and the relationships that come from it, the camaraderie and the women that participate in it," Antonio-Martineau said. "The people that attend the festival get to geek out and ask about the beer. I tell everybody - it's a vibe."

This year, Antonio-Martineau is introducing new educational workshops such as a course showcasing woman-led wine brands and a Kombucha brewing workshop led by Miami-based Radiate Kombucha. Participants can learn from Radiate Kombucha Founder Susan Aran. This offering makes the festival inclusive to those who do not drink alcohol.

"It is next to impossible for a small business to survive, let alone a small business that is led by a woman," Aran said. "Everything now is these huge national businesses, especially in craft beer and kombucha, so to see people out there just doing it their way is really, really powerful."



Female brewers at FemAle Brew Fest. Amanda Mailey, Kaiti Smith, Frances Antonio Martineau

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The brewing industry is growing, as Florida's breweries generated about \$4.2 billion in economic output in 2023, making the state the No. 4 most lucrative brewery market in the country, according to the Brewer's Association.

The festival's growth reflects the increasing representation of women in the craft beer industry, something Antonio-Martineau has witnessed firsthand. From 2018 to 2021, she led the local chapter of the Pink Boots Society, a nonprofit supporting women and nonbinary individuals in the fermented/alcoholic beverage industry. Since its start in 2017, the chapter grew from about 30 members to over 100.

One participant, Cove Brewery, opened last summer in Deerfield Beach and is on its second year participating in the festival, according to owners Jay Whelchel, his wife Melissa Whelchel, and his sister Kristy Hartofilis. The Cove Brewery's 3,000 square-foot tap room aims to usher in a 'new era of breweries,' with a family-friendly environment and diverse drink options, including wine, cocktails and 16 beers on tap.

"There's still a stigma for women being involved in breweries, so I think this event is breaking through some of those challenges," Hartofilis said.

Participating in the festival last year increased the Cove Brewery's brand awareness in the local market. To celebrate its one-year anniversary, the brewery held a community event called Covechella, which drew almost a thousand people, Whelchel said.

"The tourists and the hotels can happen, but we need to be first and foremost a neighborhood-supported operation," Whelchel said. "Our bartenders are welcoming and remember the patrons, making them all feel that this is their bar."



Over the years, the festival raised almost \$10,000 for the Abandoned Pet Rescue. This year, tickets start at \$45 and hotel packages from AC Hotel Fort Lauderdale Beach start at \$294.

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Head brewer at J Wakefield Maria Cabre said that she is excited to meet new women who are in the industry and participate in more collaborations. So far, Cabre said they have collaborated with local breweries like Unseen Creatures and Tripping Animals. Molly Flynn, a brewer at Tripping Animals in Miami, said that welcoming other breweries into their space fosters a sense of camaraderie and support, especially emerging from the pandemic.

Flynn has experienced men assuming that she doesn't know things about beer or not truly treating her like a brewer. The [FemAle Brew Fest](#) offers her and other female brewers a safe space to advance in the beverage industry.

"I'm the only woman in the back of house," Flynn said. "But when I go to this festival I see 30 or 40 other women doing the same thing, and it's really cool. I think we can learn a lot from each other. The event encourages people to see what a big impact we actually do have in this industry."

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THE LIST

South Florida's Women-Owned Businesses

Total Companywide Revenue Volume 2023

| Rank | Prior Rank | Company / Prior (*Not ranked in in year prior) / URL |
|----------------|------------|--|
| 1 | 1 | Rick Case Automotive Group |
| 2 | 2 | RCC Associates |
| 3 | 3 | Genesis Global Recruiting |
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