



Hopping into a taste of Tucson

LOCAL INGREDIENTS BLEND TO CREATE A BREWERY CULTURE
BUBBLING WITH CREATIVITY—AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

BY LAUREN WISE

“I JUST LEARNED HOW TO MAKE BEER GELATO. Nolan’s Porter will be the first gelato where it’s asked, “Can I see your I.D.?”” says Dennis Arnold, Tucson native and owner of Gentle Ben’s Brewing Company.

Yet the dark, complex Nolan Porter, named after Arnold’s first son, is refreshing in its traditional presentation, poured straight from the tap into a frosty glass. The rich brew is a local favorite and won Best Porter in America at the 1998 Great American Beer Festival.



BORDERLANDS' BEER
TAPS; (THIS PAGE) NOLAN'S
PORTER AT GENTLE BEN'S;
(OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT
TO RIGHT) A GLASS OF
DRAGOON'S IPA; HOPS
USED DURING BREWING
AT TEN FIFTY-FIVE

Since starting out in 1991 as Tucson's only brewery (at the time), Gentle Ben's has delivered beer-inspired concoctions to benefit the neighborhood, and we're not just talking about creamy ice cream-meets-alcohol treats.

In fact, the founders of four Tucson breweries spanning 20 years—Gentle Ben's Brewing Company, Ten Fifty-Five Brewing, Dragoon Brewing Company, and Borderlands Brewing Company—are convinced that the impact on the local community and celebration of history and culture are just as important as the success of any ale, IPA or lager.

The art of brewing beer has a storied past in Arizona, peppered with secrecy, success, flavors and failures. During Prohibition the region spurred lore about bootlegging outlaws, and the brewing tradition proved resilient within the community. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 brought hope for a stronger future, and the result was a reinvigorated Arizona brewing industry.

Today, craft breweries contribute around \$278 million to the state's economy, according to a 2012 Northern Arizona University study. As Arizona's second most-populated city, Tucson is a forerunner in this industry, with brewers garnering inspiration from the area's desert surroundings.

"It was important to us to project an energy that connected with people young and old," Arnold says. "We organically grew [Gentle Ben's] into something unique to Tucson." The brewery inhabits a 1908 house that had been used by the university president and a few fraternities through the years.

Arnold started with three beers, all still in circulation, joined by five other styles, including an NCAA Ale made just for the University of Arizona Wildcats basketball season.

"Tucson Blonde has been brewed in Arizona longer than any other beer," Arnold says proudly. That means Gentle Ben's has been around long enough to impact the community by participating in hundreds of local causes.

That doesn't mean that other Tucson breweries, although newcomers, are any less-focused on carrying out tradition and community involvement. Dragoon Brewing, for example, was launched in 2012. Dedicated to using local and regional ingredients like blue corn, blue agave, mesquite, cumin and coriander, the founders also support local farmers with spent grain. They tailor their beers to the drier side, claiming that it makes them more refreshing in the desert heat.

Dragoon brewer Tristan White says the brand is named after the Dragoon Mountains west of Benson. "There is a lot of history in the area, and we feel it embodies the soul of southern Arizona."

The company's origins date back to the mid-'90s when Bruce Greene brewed his first batch of beer in his kitchen. A few years later, he and his son Eric established a homebrew club, and then he studied at the American Brewers Guild and interned at Massachusetts Bay Brewing Co. (aka Harpoon) in Boston. Father and son then teamed up with White to open Dragoon as a production brewery, which now supplies more than 50 Tucson restaurants and bars, and assists local organizations.

VISIT THE BREWERIES

BORDERLANDS BREWING COMPANY
119 E. Toole Ave.
520.261.8773
borderlandsbrewing.com

DRAGOON BREWING
1859 W. Grant Rd.
520.329.3606
dragoonbrewing.com

GENTLE BEN'S
865 E. University Blvd.
520.624.4177
gentlebens.com

TEN FIFTY-FIVE BREWING
3810 E. 44th St.
520.461.8073
1055brewing.com



"Recently we partnered with the Tucson Fire Pipe & Drums to brew a beer for them, donating 15% of retail sales, \$1 from every pint in our taproom, and \$2 from every growler fill," White says.

Borderlands Brewing has also partnered charitably, once crafting a beer for the Tucson Fire Foundation, and avidly conserves water during brewing.

"We recapture the water used in our cooling equipment to save about 2,000 gallon each week," says co-owner Myles Stone, who began Borderlands with Mike Mallozzi and Blake Collins in 2010. Since then, the trio has gotten their brews—featuring Arizona Cactus Ranch prickly

pear fruit, Green Valley Pecan Company nuts, Maya Tea Company herbs and spices, and Sonora-grown vanilla—into about 20 Tucson restaurants.

"Our Prickly Pear Wheat features the tart, unique flavor of its namesake," Stone says, referring to the fruit borne of the prickly pear cactus. "For a real taste of Tucson, I'd pair the La Morena Nut Brown and an order of chicken molé."

Along with refreshing desert flavors, small-batch brewery Ten Fifty-Five serves a sentimental story. Tucson-native co-founders J.P. Vyborny and Chris Squires were first introduced by Vyborny's brother. When this brother passed away, the enthusiastic brewers decided to toil in his honor; his initials, MLV, equal "ten fifty-five" in Roman numerals.

When head brewer Vyborny's signature double IPA took first prize at the Northwest Firefighters Oktoberfest and Home Brew Challenge in 2011, Ten Fifty-Five's goal became to cement itself as Southern Arizona's premier microbrewery.

Beer varieties like Sugar Skull (a low alcohol-by-volume stout designed for drinkability in hot climates) was inspired by Tucson's All Souls Procession, while XOXO Coffee Stout uses locally roasted beans.

"We also use honey from Tempe and locally grown mole peppers, lime basil, and pineapple sage from a friend's garden," Vyborny says. "And we've received some hops from Arizona Hops & Vines that I can't wait to use."

Vyborny says that Ten Fifty-Five is always looking for more ways to serve the community.

"After all," he says, "Tucson is thirsty."