

## BEVERAGE SPOTLIGHT

# NEBRASKA BREWING COMPANY

Nebraska Brewing Company, located just outside Omaha with a taproom in La Vista, Nebraska and a brewpub in Papillion, started by accident. Owner Paul Kavulak was a home brewer struggling with a beer that wasn't right. After returning from a frustrating day at his IT job to a beer that was nowhere near his expectations, he reached a breaking point. He grabbed a large bag of hops and dumped the entire contents into the fermenter to finish the destruction of a beer destined for the trash, put the lid

back on, and walked away. Two weeks later he went to dispose of the flop and was shocked to find that, in his anger, he had created the result he'd been seeking. When the beer was finally ready to drink, he knew instantly it was good enough to sell.

### MARKET EXPANSION

With the help of his wife, Kim, Paul opened the brewpub in 2007. After two years, between a bad economy and a local market not quite ready to fully embrace craft beer, they realized they were going to

have to change their plans to survive. With a marketing plan Paul describes as "a little beer in a lot of places," the company began to distribute to states along the east coast and found a lot of success as they continued to work on attracting locals. Demand steadily increased, and in 2014 they opened their taproom and production brewery. Today Nebraska Brewing distributes to over 30 states and three countries outside of the United States.

### THE BEERS

Nebraska Brewing offers six regular beers that are always on tap along with seven regularly produced barrel-aged varieties. The two originals, the Cardinal Pale Ale and the EOS Hefeweizen, started as homebrews, are still two of the most popular offerings, and have won numerous awards from competitions around the world. The Cardinal, an American-style pale ale, is the number one seller. "We never set out to have a flagship beer, but we're selling so much, it's hard to keep up



with the stock,” says Paul. “It’s obviously the clear choice from a consumer perspective. It’s a great beer. EOS is the only American beer to ever beat the Germans in the German beer category in Germany. And it was in a can!”

## SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

In addition to its core beers, the brewery constantly experiments with new seasonal and limited edition barrel-aged beers. In a recent brew created to celebrate Nebraska’s sesquicentennial, they were able to use locally sourced hops for the first time. “Hops take about two to three years to mature,” Paul explains, noting that the hops used in the Meadowlark 150 are second year hops. “We know in the third year they’ll be so much better, and we’ll continue to use them.”

The decision to can rather than bottle for distribution was partly financial and partly environmental in addition to being better for the beer. Cans are lighter than

bottles when it comes to shipping, are able to go to places where bottles aren’t allowed, and keep light out. “A can is already made from 60 percent recycled material,” notes Paul, and it takes less energy to recycle it later. In fact, the brewery recently switched to new cans. “The whole top comes off, and that lets you experience the aroma and gives you a more broad experience of the beer.” By-products and equipment from brewing are repurposed whenever possible. Spent grains are picked up by a local rancher and fed to cattle. Barrels used in creation of the barrel-aged beers even received new life as tables for the taproom, a design created by Paul.

## A DECADE OF BREWING

In November, the brewery will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Paul says they plan to celebrate with some special beers and a party to thank everyone for the support. The decade passed quickly and led the company to unexpected places. “We never intended to be anything more than a brewpub, but when the economy turned the wrong way, we had to adapt, and that forced distribution,” he says. “We never intended for such expansive distribution, but we fed the demand to become a bigger brewery,” he adds. “The world has pulled us into who we are, versus us saying that this is our business plan, and this is what we’re going to do.”

