

## New brewery coming to Somers Point

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SOMERS POINT — Among New York Avenue’s quiet residential plots, motorists’ eyes are drawn in by the highlighter yellow color of the Somers Point Brewing Company’s front.

Five of the six friends that have a stake in the new brewery, which opens this week, met at the FAA William J. Hughes Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township and still hold jobs there. The sixth is an airline pilot out of Maryland, originally from the area.

Two brew the beer; two oversee operations; two handle the finances and marketing.

What they all share is a love of beer and a hope that they can leverage their location to turn that love into a living.

The new company — in the old Somers Point Ice Company building on New York Avenue — is in a town with a serious pride of place, across the bridge from a dry town (Ocean City), situated in a region where beer lovers can string together microbrewery tours.

Co-owner John DiNofrio, 51, of Linwood, said they want to be the area’s “hometown brewery.”

The owners — DiNofrio, Kevin Szagala, Deepak Chauhan, Mike Prata, Bob Biedrzycki and Ed Siegel — have had soft openings for friends, and will open Thursday to the public. With seven of 12 taps already connected to kegs, and a Somers Point theme slowly coming together, the friends are now holding their breath.

“Someone asked us the question, ‘Do you feel relieved now that you’re finally opening?’” said DiNofrio. “I’m like, ‘No, I’m not relieved. I think we’re more nervous.’”

He said they’ve embraced the work ahead of them this summer, and warned their wives of how much time they’ll be spending at the New York Avenue location.

They’ve put close to \$500,000 into the operation — and close to \$150,000 into the seven-barrel brewing system alone — according to DiNofrio.

“Right now, since we’re opening, we’re just going with the tried-and-true (beers),” said Szagala, 39, of Williamstown. “Initially, we’re kind of sticking to the baselines. But eventually, I’d like to start branching out and doing some more experimental stuff.”

Having visited their friend’s Woodstock Brewpub in Virginia many times on their way to Virginia Tech football games, they decided to finally give it a shot themselves. In June 2017, they made an offer on the building contingent on the city giving them the green light to brew there. They got the go-ahead in November of that year and began construction.

The longest federal government shutdown ever, from Dec. 22 to Jan. 25, meant the friends were furloughed.

“It gave us more time to work here,” DiNofrio said, “and that’s what we did.”

The inside has a giant “ICE” sign from the building’s former occupant and will feature Somers Point memorabilia and historical photographs of the area. The beer names are mostly inspired by the area, too, including OC Amber Ale, Beesley’s Point Brown Ale and Big Nose.

“If you ever saw Richard Somers, who was the famous naval commander, he’s got a big nose,” DiNofrio said. “I want to get a picture of him and hang it on the wall.”

They’re looking to sell to bars and restaurants off Bay Avenue and Shore Road before they think about restaurants farther away.

“We have so many local beers on now, that I can’t see us not having it on (tap),” said Gregory Gregory, owner of Gregory’s Restaurant and Bar. “If they run it right, and they have a nice product, and they add to the community and add to the bar scene, then I think it’s a win-win.”

Ron Meischker, a city councilman and founder of the Patcong Creek Foundation, said the new brewery will be the beer sponsor for the “Attack on Patcong Creek” crabbing tournament this year.

“Somers Point has a tradition of fine pubs and eateries, but we don’t have a microbrewery,” Meischker said. “So I think there’s plenty of room here in Somers Point for them to carve out their own niche.”

There are some 14 breweries in the Press’ coverage area, according to New Jersey Craft Beer, from Cape May Brewing Company to Hidden Sands Brewing Company in Egg Harbor Township. The owners see them as potential collaborators rather than competition.

Still, Thursday marks a test for the business as it tries to find its footing.

“One thing that gives us a little peace of mind is we know that our beer is good,” said co-owner Deepak Chauhan, 36, of Egg Harbor Township. “We’re getting people that are into beer and we are getting people that are just happy that a local business named after the town is coming here.”