



## Craft beer in Maryland

By Jack Perdue



### Walking Tour

Judy Neff, co-owner and brewer at **Checkerspot Brewing**, wants the world to know that their new location, at 1421 Ridgely St. in Baltimore, is now open for business. The grand opening party was Sept. 16. Maryland comptroller Brooke Lierman did the official ribbon cutting, and there was a special release of *Cut Spike*, a brown ale hopped with Simcoe.

As previously reported, this is the fourth brewery to set up shop in the Pigtown neighborhood, just west of the sports stadium district. Checkerspot and the three others—Pickett Brewing, Suspended Brewing, and Wico Street Beer Co.—have joined forces to create the South Baltimore Brewery District (SoBo). Their inaugural event will be a day-long celebration on Oct. 28. Event-goers will enjoy new craft beer releases and live music as they walk between the four breweries, all of which are within a mile of one another.

“Neighborhood breweries are a crucial part of modern communities and serve as vibrant destinations for tourists and locals,” stated Jim Bauckman, director of communications for Grow and Fortify, the group that manages the Brewers Association of Maryland.

### An Australian Brewery in Baltimore

As Checkerspot left their old location at 1399 S. Sharp St., a new brewery, **M8 Beer**, re-opened those doors on Sept. 3. Such operations are called “hermit crab breweries” because they occupy the shells of defunct or departed businesses.

M8 is pronounced “mate,” like the Aussie slang for “friend,” and they’ll focus on beer styles popular in Australia. They’ve begun with an abbreviated beer lineup including *Czech M8* (a pilsner), *Slim Dusty Hazy IPA*, *Whitsunday XPA* (an extra pale ale with an abv of 5.5%, lower than a

typical IPA), and *Fraser Island Pacific Ale* (a style known for its “tropical fruit flavours on the back of a West Coast IPA base”). Eventually, the 15-bbl brewery will produce 15 beers on tap.

Jeff Osborne, the principal behind M8, grew up in Australia and first came to Baltimore in 1999 to play squash. He’s never been a brewer and has hired Brendan Fitzsimmons, formerly head brewer at AleCraft Brewery in Bel Air, to take charge of production.

The brewery purchased most of the equipment Checkerspot had been using, except for the canning line.

M8 will have a full kitchen serving dishes with an Australian twist, like kangaroo bangers and brisket. Other items will incorporate Asian and Latin flavors.

Jeff relates, “Our first plan was to sell beers from the eight states starting with the letter ‘M,’ but after our Aussie team saw the letter M and the number 8 together, we knew we had to make Aussie style beers for our mates and all of yours.”

M8 will be open every evening with additional daytime hours on Saturdays and Sundays. Check [M8beer.com](http://M8beer.com) for updates.

### Closings

**Patuxent Brewing** in Waldorf announced on Sept. 11, via social media, that they are ceasing production. But there’s a note of hope: “We greatly appreciate y’all, but remember, it’s not goodbye, it’s see ya later, so be on the lookout for more info in the near future.”

After 10 years, **Denizens Brewing** announced that it’s closing its original location in Silver Spring as of Oct. 22. With the lease on the property coming to an end, the owners decided to focus their energy on their larger production brewery in Riverdale Park.

**Celebrating the grand opening of Checkerspot Brewing’s new location are, from left to right, Brooke Lierman, Maryland comptroller; Judy Neff, Checkerspot co-owner and brewer; and Rob Neff, Checkerspot co-owner and head of sales and distribution.**  
PHOTO BY JACK PERDUE



### Guinness to Host Festival

The **Guinness Open Gate Brewery** in Relay, just outside Baltimore, celebrated its fifth anniversary with a party during the first week of August. To mark that milestone, they donated \$50,000 to the Brewers Association of Maryland (BAM).

Guinness also announced that it will host an inaugural Guinness Beer Festival in 2024, with all proceeds benefiting BAM. The event will host breweries from the Baltimore region. Keep checking [GuinnessBreweryBaltimore.com](http://GuinnessBreweryBaltimore.com) for more details.

Back in June, Guinness announced that it would shut down its large brewery in Relay and move production of its *Baltimore Blonde* to New York. As a result, it’s selling off 45 acres of property, with a deal set to close by early October. However, the taproom and restaurant will remain open, as will a 10-bbl innovation brewery.

### Blonde Ambition

When Guinness announced that it was downsizing, Baltimore County officials offered \$500,000 to assist local breweries in taking over the brewing of *Guinness Baltimore Blonde Ale*. **Heavy Seas Beer** in Halethorpe made a pitch to take over production, but ultimately Guinness decided to move brewing to F.X. Matt Brewing in Utica, NY.

Heavy Seas reacted to the snub by introducing *BOHdacious Blonde* (4.5% abv), a beer that the brewery terms “an authentic Baltimore blonde ale.” The name is a play on *National Bohemian* or *Nattie Boh*, another one-time Baltimore brew that is no longer made in Maryland.

Interesting, *Nattie Boh* had a companion brand called *National Premium*, which Heavy Seas is brewing under contract. The connections never cease.

### Native Hop

On Oct. 20, Heavy Seas was set to release *Altimore*, the first commercial brand to experiment with what’s called the Monocacy hop, a unique strain native to Maryland. Heavy Seas brewmaster Chris Leonard has praised the hop for its “spicy, herbaceous, floral aromatics.” *Altimore*, a German-style altbier, will be available only on draft at the taproom. However, Heavy Seas plans to cooperate with the University of Maryland Extension to produce additional beers with the Monocacy hop, for packaging and wider distribution.

In other Heavy Seas news, the brewery is planning the annual release of its hoppy strong ale *Winter Storm*, plus *Chocolate Volcano* (a bourbon-barrel-aged stout). Available in 19.2-oz cans are *Double Cannon Double IPA* and *Impending Doom Original*, a hazy double IPA.



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### Black Flag Brewing

Black Flag Brewing isn’t exactly in a nightlife district.

The first production brewery and taproom in Columbia, Md., it sits in a non-descript business park, behind Lincoln Tech’s parking lot.

But if you attended their seventh-anniversary celebration on July 29 or the pre-anniversary party the day before, you might have been impressed.

Tickets for the latter were offered to their Bottle Club on a first-come-first-served basis. All 75 seats sold out in advance, as members crowded in to sample all seven anniversary brews, including a *7th Anniversary Hazy DIPA* dry-hopped with Citra, Simcoe, Nelson and El Dorado.

Their bottle club is well worth checking out. The latest release was *Everyone’s Grudge*, an imperial bourbon-barrel-aged maple cheesecake stout conditioned on Costa Rican Pompona vanilla beans.

It’s too late to join for 2023—membership has been capped at 125. But details for joining the 2024 Bottle Club should be released by early November; check online for details.

Even regular customers have much to choose from. The 20-bbl brewery supplies 15 taps. Black Flag was planning a special bottled offering for a general release on Oct. 14. They’ve taken their pumpkin stout and aged it for a year in *Heaven Hill* bourbon barrels. As the aging concluded, they collaborated with *Sophomore Coffee* in Baltimore to add a type of bean called *La Libertad* from Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

Just ask for *My Axe Prefers Lattes*.

**BLACK  
FLAG  
BREWING CO**

**Black Flag Brewing**  
9315 Snowden River Parkway  
Columbia, Md. 21046  
(442) 864-5139  
[blackflagbrewingco.com](http://blackflagbrewingco.com)

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day beer, *Hail to the Harris*, as a way of cheering on the Washington Commanders. The beer, a hazy New England-style IPA, honors the NFL team's new owner Josh Harris, whose \$6 billion purchase of the Commanders has energized their fan base.

Virginia has allotted funds for a new program to help small breweries get their beer to market. The state budget, signed by Governor Glenn Youngkin on Sept. 14, creates the Virginia Beer Distribution Company, a division of the state's Department of Agriculture and Community Services. Small breweries, who can't attract the attention of a Budweiser- or Miller-affiliated house, will be able to sell up to 500 bbl through the VBDC next year.

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### Communal Harvest

I'd like to finish the column with another great example of the collegiality that exemplifies the craft-brewing industry. Michael and Sharon Reifsnnyder grow hops at GEMS Farms in Carlisle. When Michael needed surgery during the peak hop-harvesting season this August, a number of local breweries joined teams of pickers to pluck and bag the cones. Participating breweries included Aldus Brewing, Molly Pitcher Brewing Company, Back Porch Brewing and Lindgren Craft Brewery. The resulting wet-hop beers should be on the

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my pipe and stash into a viney, weedy ravine before the police arrived.

I was breathalized, arrested, booked, finger-printed and locked in a cell until my wife arrived to bail me out. While waiting, I did the math in my head: four pints of imperial-strength ale (average abv 8.3%) was the equivalent of 8.8 standard drinks or 8.8 twelve-ounce *Budweisers* (5% abv) or about 5-1/4 ounces of pure alcohol. Four hours after my first beer, I would have metabolized nearly two ounces of that alcohol, leaving me with an estimated blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .12, or 1.2 parts alcohol for every thousand parts of blood. I was fortunate to have blown only a point-one-oh. Had I consumed four pints of 5% pilsners, say, instead of high-gravity hop bombs, my BAC would have been .07—just below the limit.

Yep, strength matters.

This column is an excerpt from *George Rivers' latest book, Strong Beer: 15 Years of "Strength Matters," which is due out at the end of this year.*

### Mark Your Calendars

**Stable Craft Brewing** in Waynesboro will conduct Haunted Brewery Tours from 1 to 4 p.m. on Oct. 28, available free with any food purchase. The next day, on Oct. 29, the brewery will offer, with the purchase of any adult entrée, 'smores kits to enjoy around the campfire.

Finally, the Old Dominion will celebrate Virginia Cider Week on Nov. 10-19. Cider fans can gather on Nov. 18 at the historic Lloyd House at 220 N. Washington St. for the Alexandria Cider Festival. The event will include live music and food trucks. Check [virginiacider.org/events/](http://virginiacider.org/events/) for additional happenings.

*Charles Pekow and Annie Tobey contributed to this article.*

market now in the Cumberland County area.

Lancaster's Our Town and Spring House Breweries brought back some of the green gold as well. Our Town brewed a pale ale with all Double Eagle pilsner malt and Tahoma hops, much smaller than other varieties but with a subtle, alluring lemon-peel aroma. Spring House will brew a beer with Triple Pearl hops, a variety noted for its orange, pepper and pine flavors.

Drive safely as you visit these fine beer venues and enjoy the fall weather!

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### Beer and Beyond

"This summer, we released some experimental hard seltzers, and y'all really seemed to like them!" said **Love City Brewing's** co-founder Melissa Walter. As a result, they're experimenting with some other alternative beverages. "Can't share too much right now, but if you like our cocktails, you'll probably enjoy what we're cooking up!"

For new brews, she promises *Love Fest Oktoberfest* and *Monstro Pumpkin Ale* (their first pumpkin beer).

### Patience!

The crew at **Sacred Vice Brewing** in Harrowgate is still waiting to open their new location, calling the previous few months their "summer of infinite patience." In the meantime, they're expanding regular hours at their Amber Street taproom: Thursday 5-8 p.m., Friday 5-9 p.m. and Saturday noon-6 p.m. They've got a diverse selection of beers pouring, ranging from *Back Trunk Bitches Dark Mild* to *Haunted Marble Saison* to *Last Look German Ale* to *Refrain IPA* (showcasing Citra and Nelson Sauvin hops).

### How Self-Serving

Welcome to Tapster, Philly's first self-service bar at 110-116 S. 16th St. According to their website, you open an account with your credit card and are given a "tapcard" to activate whichever of 54 taps you choose.

Drinks are priced by the ounce from 17 cents to \$2.20. Besides beer, they offer wine, spirits, cider and hard seltzer, as well as a few non-alcoholic options like cold-brew coffee and soda.

Bar staff is able to monitor the alcohol and volume of each pour to prevent customers from being overserved.

When I heard of the concept, I thought, "The Liquor Board will never allow that!" Well, they did—the LCB is certainly getting more flexible!

### Closing

Sadly, **Liquid Barrel House** (formerly Roy Pitz Brewing) has closed. They announced on Facebook: "After just over six years, we are unable to continue to support our presence in this fair city. We are shifting our focus to our locations in Chambersburg and Gettysburg, but not without extremely heavy hearts."

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### Best of the Rest

To celebrate its chief crop, **Manor Hill Brewing** in Ellicott City planned to release *14 Acres*, a cream ale with both flaked corn and Manor Hill's own non-GMO corn in the grist. For Halloween, the brewery is offering *My Own Murder*, a black IPA brewed with Ecuadorian cacao nibs and sweet orange peel.

**Key Brewing** in Dundalk will mark its eighth anniversary on the weekend of Oct. 20-22 with live music plus a farmers market and farm brewery celebration. Check out [keybrewing.com](http://keybrewing.com) for details.

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