

# Saturday

# special



## Local brewery shutting down street for anniversary

## block party

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

While Keowee Brewing Company owner Alex Butterbaugh almost didn't make the crowler machine purchase, it became a crucial component of sales during the COVID-19 shutdown. The large aluminum cans are the only way he'll sell the beer to be taken off the premises, he said, and most customers see the benefit of not bringing glass to the park, on the boat or on their hikes.



Keowee Brewing Company is celebrating its one-year anniversary this weekend with a block party.

SENECA — While they couldn't have known their first year would technically only be 10 months due to a two-month state-wide shutdown, Keowee Brewing Company is celebrating its first anniversary with a block party this weekend.

The street in front of the brewery, which is located at 401 E. Main St., will be closed for the day, thanks to state and city permission granted back in early March, expanding outdoor space for the day-long block party. With live music from three local artists, a food truck and a new beer release, Saturday's 11 a.m.-8 p.m. event isn't just a celebration of the business' success, it's a celebration of the community.

"The city and community have been extremely supportive and welcomed us with open arms. We hope to have reciprocated that back to everybody," owner Alex Butterbaugh said. "It's been a lot of fun getting to know everybody, getting to see a lot of new faces walking through the door all the times."

Gypsy and Me starts the show at 11 a.m., Trey Stephens takes the stage at 3:30 p.m. and LC Branch wraps things up with a set from 6-8 p.m.

While Butterbaugh and his wife, Allison, might have made a few tweaks to the building in hindsight — putting in the supports for the brewing equipment upstairs was expensive and labor-intensive — they consider the first year a true success.

A partnership blossomed with Mark Winters from Pub Blue, which brought full-time food to the brewery without taking its focus away from the beer.

"Our initial business model was that we weren't going to have in-house food, we were just going to use food trucks. But it became a lot of work getting food trucks to come here," Allison said. "One of the really beautiful business glow ups was the addition of food and Blue Marble downstairs."

Known to make special brews for special occasions — One Year Around the Sun in honor of their son's first birthday last summer and Proof of Purchase to mark the day they closed on the building in October — Butterbaugh has a special bourbon barrel-aged beer ready to be tapped for Saturday.

The COVID-19 shutdown, though it stretched their budget a bit, allowed for some improve-

ments to the back patio and drink variety.

The formerly sloped yard is now tiered and boasts picnic tables and shade cloths to offer additional seating, which was always in the plan, the Butterbaughs said, but kept getting pushed back. The shutdown gave them time to make the space more inviting just in time for Gov. Henry McMaster to allow restaurants to reopen with outdoor seating.

But the slowdown also gave Alex time to work on some test batches of new brews. Hard seltzers, brewed without gluten, and lagers now grace the tap list — two things he never thought he'd see on the Keowee Brewing menu.

"We get to experiment a lot," he said. "Some of the beers we make, you might not see again, but there should always be

something new and interesting coming up next. That's the perk of brewing everything in-house."

The shiny equipment is on display behind the bar, one aspect that makes this brewery unique, the Butterbaughs said. Typically, it's tucked away in another building or hidden from view, but there's no mistaking where the one-of-a-kind concoctions served at the brewery are coming from.

One purchase worth stretching the initial budget for was the crowler cans, machine and labels. Even being over budget for the brewery, that \$5,000 expense was more worth it than he realized at the time.

When to-go orders were the only option, Keowee Brewing had the 32-oz. cans on-hand to serve its beer to go and was able to keep steady foot traffic and its employee list intact during the shutdown.

With all the highs and lows of being a first-year business, not to mention all of the unplanned expenses and headaches that accompanied a natural disaster and a pandemic, the Butterbaughs count Saturday as a high.

"A year is, I think, really something really worth celebrating," Alex said. "We worked for more than 18 months to get this place open, so to be able to see all the positives that have come out of it in the past year has been really, really cool. That's something worth celebrating, not to mention all the support we got through the shutdown."

"We can't thank everyone enough for coming on a daily basis and buying crowlers from us. So, why not throw a big party and pay back everybody for all the support they've given us the past year, especially the past three months? The town just went through a terrible tornado, and we want to have something to celebrate, look forward to and give back to the community a little bit in the way of relief for a day."



Keowee Brewing Company owners Allison and Alex Butterbaugh pose weekend and serve seven different beers on tap ranging from IPAs to

for a portrait inside of their brewery. The brewery will open up this a raspberry wheat.

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