



Whatcom craft distillers busy making products, getting closer to opening

By DAVE GALLAGHER — THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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It's taking a little longer than expected, but three Whatcom County distilleries are getting closer to opening.

Recent changes to the craft distillery rules have opened the door for companies that want to create unique products with hard liquor. Mount Baker Distillery has its various permits and licenses approved and is currently producing small amounts of product, said operator Troy Smith.

He's aiming for a Friday, June 1 opening, which is also when approved private businesses can start selling hard liquor. Smith said he plans to sell his craft spirits at the distillery, which is in Bellingham's Haskell Business Park.

At this point, he's focusing on selling vodka and moonshine. While he has been talking to some distributors, Smith said he intends to sell the product only at the distillery for now, being open on weekends and by appointment. Details about the opening will be posted on the company's Facebook page.

A much larger operation is BelleWood Distilling, which is aiming for a soft opening in July. The company is putting the finishing touches on a 12,000-square-foot building on Guide Meridian, south of Lynden, that will have the distillery, restaurant, gift shop and art center. Using apples from the nearby BelleWood Acres orchards, some of the bottled product is expected to be ready in August or September, said Jake Fowler, general manager of the retail outlet and distillery.

BelleWood plans to start with non-flavored vodka, followed by gin and brandy. As the apples become ready for harvest, hard cider and other flavored products will follow. Fowler said they've been doing plenty of tests to come up with the right recipe; flavored products present a particular challenge trying to produce something with a smooth taste.

"We're excited about how things are going and have been chomping at the bit to start rolling out a product," he said.

According to its Facebook posts, Chuckanut Bay Distillery has noted that building its distillery is taking longer than expected, but they are still making progress. Owners Matt Howell and Kelly Andrews are building the distillery on Railroad Avenue, near Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro. Once open, they plan to start with vodka and gin, then add whiskey.

All three distilleries plan to have small-sample areas on site, which is one of the changes to the craft distillery licenses. On Friday, June 1, craft distillers that are ready will be allowed to have products on the shelves at approved private stores.

OTHER TIDBITS

- A tenant improvement permit was approved to convert a space at 103 E. Stuart St. (in the retail center near Walmart) into an eatery called Cupcakes Like it Sweet.
- A Bellingham permit was also approved to put a Best Buy mobile store in a space at Bellis Fair mall.
- A liquor license application was filed for a business at 2612 W. Maplewood Ave. called Neto's Market & Bakery. The applicants are Ernesto Garcia-Apreza and Petra Apreza.
- The Hannegan Supermarket at 6912 Hannegan Road has had its liquor license discontinued, its phone disconnected and appears to be closed. A new liquor license was filed for the same space, with the proposed name of the new business called Community Supermarket. The applicants are Mohinder and Inderjit Sangha.

Retail Tip Sheet runs each Sunday. Reach DAVE GALLAGHER at dave.gallagher@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2269. Visit his business blog online at blogs.bellinghamherald.com/business or get updates on Twitter at twitter.com/BhamHeraldBiz.

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