

★★★
THE MAN
 WITH
A PLAN ★
 ... AND A
Plan B

**HOW A HEART FOR FAMILY
 AND COMMUNITY
 BROUGHT A NEW BREWERY
 TO CARROLL COUNTY**

Littleton, Colorado

BY LINDSAY SHERMAN

Photography by Tae Kerney



Mike McKelvin '88 has a knack for starting businesses right before the world falls apart. After a career winding its way through broadcasting, emergency management, sales, waterproofing, and home accessibility, McKelvin bought a construction company in 2008; six months later, the housing crisis happened.

Fast forward 12 years and he and his family finally got to open the doors to their new brewery and taproom in February 2020, only to have the COVID-19 pandemic shut those same doors just three weeks later. "But if there's one thing I know how to do," he says, "it's how to plan." And plan he did.

Those plans (whether plan A, B, or sometimes even C) have given McKelvin a life leading two thriving businesses, keeping his family and his community at the forefront of everything, no matter how many times he has to redraw the plan.

McKelvin vividly remembers sitting around a table with friends at Old Westminster Winery in the summer of 2017 when the idea for a family-owned brewery in Carroll County came to mind. He called his cousin, Zac Rissmiller, a successful brewer out in Colorado and pitched the idea to him.

"Zac had just medaled at the Great American Beer Festival for a Hefeweizen. Watching the owners of Old Westminster Winery all work together, I thought, 'We can do this here,'" McKelvin says.

But Rissmiller wasn't so sure. "He said 'no' right away. He goes, 'The beer laws in Maryland are too difficult. If you wanted to do it in Pennsylvania or Virginia, I'd do it. But not in Maryland.'"

McKelvin thought that was the end of the story. But that December, Rissmiller called him back and asked, "Are you really serious that you want to do this?" McKelvin didn't hesitate.

That's how the dream of a family-owned business was brought to life over a phone call 1,623 miles apart — and brought 1623 Brewing Company to Maryland.



**FAMILY-OWNED,
 COMMUNITY-DRIVEN**

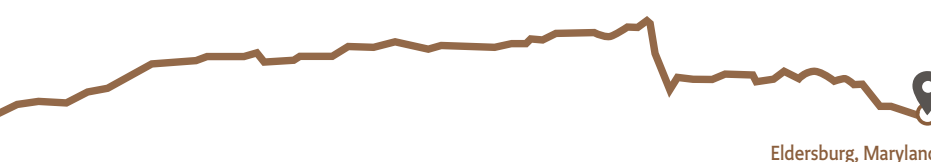
FAMILY OWNED:

Mike McKelvin tries not to pick favorite beers, just like he wouldn't pick a favorite child (after all, both of his daughters work at 1623 with him). But one beer holds a special place in his heart.

McKelvin Cypress Reserve is an Irish red ale that his cousin, Zac Rissmiller, brewed as an homage to their family's origins in Northern Ireland. The McKelvins came to the U.S. through Georgia, so the Cypress Reserve ale is infused with cypress wood from Georgia.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN:

One of the ways 1623 tries to stay community driven is by donating a portion of sales to local charities. In November, the brewery donated \$5,000 each to the Carroll Hospital Foundation and Susan G. Komen Maryland. "The community really allowed us to stay open and to be profitable during a really hard time," says taproom general manager Carrie Nevius '16. "Because of that, we have to give back." Each month, the brewery holds a different fundraiser to benefit an area organization and do as much outreach for the community as it can.



Left: Mike McKelvin '88 had a home-brewing operation for a couple years in the mid-1990s. At the time, he didn't dream of owning one of Maryland's largest breweries. But that's exactly what happened when he opened the doors to 1623 Brewing Company in Eldersburg, Maryland, in February 2020.

Spring 2021





CONTRACT BREWING AND DISTRIBUTION DEALS

“

WE STARTED OUT SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A SEVEN-BARREL AND A 15-BARREL BREWING SYSTEM. WE WANTED SMALL-SCALE DISTRIBUTION AND A NICE TAPROOM WHERE YOU COULD COME HEAR A GUY PLAY ACOUSTIC GUITAR. THEN DISTRIBUTION TOOK OFF.”



WHAT'S ON TAP?

Once they had a name and a plan, Rissmiller and McKelvin started talking to other breweries in Maryland about the possibility of pursuing contract brewing until they had a space to brew, package, and distribute on their own. In September 2018, Baltimore brewer DuClaw Brewing helped them brew their first beer; by November, they'd worked out a distribution agreement

with Chesapeake Beverage.

At the turn of the calendar in January 2019, McKelvin had negotiated distribution deals with three distributors in Maryland and they began to think about looking for locations for a brewery and taproom. “We started out somewhere between a seven-barrel and a 15-barrel brewing system,” McKelvin says. “We wanted small-scale

distribution and a nice taproom where you could come hear a guy play acoustic guitar. Then distribution took off.” Quickly, 1623 went from selling 200 to 300 cases per month to 1,500 to 1,800 cases per month — before ever signing a lease on a brewery. So, the location search criteria shifted. “We were always coming to Carroll

County with this. Despite the fact that while I was at McDaniel, I swore I would never come back to Westminster, my wife and I moved here in 1994 and haven't left,” McKelvin says, remembering his home brewing operation that only lasted from 1995 to 1997. “We knew we were going to build it out here, it was just a matter of exactly where.”

After several months and checking out multiple possible locations, the McKelvin family broke ground in June 2019 on the location in Eldersburg to build out a 30-barrel system with the capability of double batching. That means 1623 can currently brew 60 barrels at a time, or 5,000 barrels per year. And that's just a start.

Looking for an idea of what kind of beers to expect at 1623 Brewing Company? Whether you're looking for a classic or a special brew, there's a little something for everyone. Stop in for a taster, half pour, full pour, or grab a crowler or a four- or six-pack to go.

THE CORE FOUR:

- 1623 IPA
- 1623 Pilsner
- 1623 Hefeweizen
- 1623 Stout

SOMETHING SPECIAL*:

*Not an all-inclusive list. As a true craft brewer, many of 1623 Brewing Company's specialty brews are seasonal or on rotation. McKelvin says in 2021 the brewery will distribute an additional 10 beers and brew about 20 others that will only be available at the taproom.

- GnarleyBurg (West Coast IPA)
- Cow Lick (a salted caramel milk stout)
- Peanut Butter Honey Time (a peanut butter honey milk stout)
- A Long Winter's Night (an orange ginger and maple seltzer)
- A La Mode Nitro (a white chocolate cherry cream ale)
- Yellow Brix Road (an El Dorado hopped double hazy IPA)
- Lupulin Comet (double IPA)
- Dirty Blonde (a chai white stout)
- BA Old Proper (barley wine aged in Templeton Rye Whiskey barrels)
- Sinking Ship (a coconut Baltic porter)
- On The Fly (a brown ale)
- The Dean (an Italian Pilsner, dedicated to Baltimore sports broadcaster Vince Bagli, who gave McKelvin his first job after graduation)
- Talusman SmaSH Lager (a lager with flavors of pink grapefruit, dried roses, and pine)



Above:

1. The 30-barrel system at 1623 has a double-batching capacity, meaning the brewery can put out about 5,000 barrels of beer per year. An upcoming expansion will increase that to 15,000 barrels per year.
2. Having a canning line already in place at the brewery and taproom in Eldersburg meant that 1623 Brewing was able to pivot to curbside and to-go beer distribution without delay during the COVID-19 shutdown.
3. True to McKelvin's initial vision, 1623 regularly hosts live music in the taproom to entertain guests while they enjoy their beers.



“

WE NEEDED THE COMMUNITY. AND APPARENTLY, THEY NEEDED US, TOO. WE'RE BUILDING SOMETHING THAT IS GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL DESPITE COVID-19. SO MUCH SO THAT OUR THREE-YEAR PLAN FOR THE BREWERY HAS BECOME A 10-MONTH PLAN.”

On Feb. 22, 2020, the McKelvin family could not have dreamed of a better outcome for their grand opening weekend. “You couldn’t move in here. It was amazing,” McKelvin says. “We probably turned well over 1,500 people through this room in three days. We had a line going up the road, as late as 8:30 p.m., on our first night.”

At the grand opening, McKelvin remembers being struck by a speech the head of the Maryland Brewer’s Association gave ahead of the ribbon cutting: “He said that 1623 would be the fifth-largest brewery in Maryland. I was a little bit nervous then.” But with the community turning out in the numbers they did, McKelvin and Rissmiller thought everything would be smooth sailing from there.

Less than a month later, the brand new, fifth-largest brewery in Maryland — along with all the others in the state — was forced to close its doors to comply with COVID-19 lockdowns. “The only thing I know how to do is plan,” McKelvin says again. “I came in the following week and called a staff meeting. I told them we were going to prepare everything as if we were going to reopen on June 6 and that we were going to separate the room out to 50% capacity. In the meantime, we were going to pump up our to-go beer operation and pump up our friends in the food truck industry.”

Over 13 weeks of being shut down, his plan worked. “We had people tailgating outside,” McKelvin says. “They were buying to-go beer, buying food from the food trucks,

setting up chairs in the parking lot. They kept us alive.”

When the governor allowed outdoor service to resume in May, McKelvin went right to the liquor board to get approval for outdoor drinking. They set up tables everywhere they could — enough to safely seat 300 people — and once again, had customers waiting in line to visit the brewery.

“We needed the community. And apparently, they needed us, too,” McKelvin says. “We’re building something that is going to be successful despite COVID-19. So much so that our three-year plan for the brewery has become a 10-month plan.”



Above: The McKelvin family — Cameron, Sandy, Mike, Jordan, and Jordan’s fiancé, Tom Sapp — always envisioned 1623 Brewing as a place for family and community. Mike can often be found behind the bar chatting with guests, who feel welcome to bring their children and dogs to enjoy companionship, food from local food trucks, and, of course, craft beer.

Check out bonus video content at mcdaniel.edu/magazine to meet Mike McKelvin and get an inside look at 1623 Brewing Company.





BIGGER AND BETTER

This year McKelvin, Rissmiller, and the entire 1623 family — which includes 27 employees, six of whom are full time — will triple their brewing capacity with an expansion of their current site. “We’re moving into a tier of breweries that doesn’t exist,” McKelvin says. “We’re very fortunate that in the worst possible time to start a business, we have unbelievable support from a community of beer lovers and the communities of Eldersburg and Sykesville.”

As of March, 1623 distributed to the entire state of Maryland and 34 counties in Pennsylvania, with plans to move into Northern Virginia and Delaware to become a true Mid-Atlantic brewery. By 2022, McKelvin’s goal is to be talking with distributors in New York, Ohio, and North Carolina.

McKelvin has taken a lot of inspiration from the model that Tom Kehoe ’88, founder and president of Yards Brewing, has built his business on. “Tom is a sizeable, regional brewer, and that’s where we’re headed,” McKelvin says. “It will take a little bit to get there, but we can do it. And I look forward to the day that Tom and I can work together on a 1623 and Yards collaboration brew in

honor of our Western Maryland/McDaniel days.”

Just as he’s come back to his Carroll County roots, McKelvin will always hold true to his mission, which is on every beer can they distribute: “Family-owned, community-driven.” Whether working on a collaboration beer for his alma mater (he already has a name for it: “Tailgate on the Hill”), partnering with the Jonathan Ogden Foundation, supporting the Eldersburg Rogue Runners and local youth sports, or holding special events just to raise spirits in the community, McKelvin knows his family’s business wouldn’t have succeeded without that focus.

The brewery regularly has food trucks on site, hosts “Bends & Brews” yoga classes, live music and trivia nights, and puts on special events. “We did a dog costume party at Halloween, and that one scared me,” McKelvin says with a laugh. “That may be the closest we’ve come to a super-spreader event. I had no idea that many people would show up. That and hosting Santa here for kids to safely visit with him before Christmas were the kinds of morale-boosting events we all needed

in 2020.”

For a guy who reluctantly came to school on the Hill and swore he’d never return to Carroll County, Mike McKelvin has built quite a life here. “I wish I would have understood at 19 years old; stupid kid didn’t understand what he had in front of him at the time,” he says. “Now I know that McDaniel was the framework to start building something bigger, better all the time. It was way later in life that I realized how much it helped me and how those little bits and pieces that I thought were insignificant weren’t.”

And McKelvin wants everyone to know it’s never too late to learn the lesson. After all, he’s the man whose businesses survived their first years during the recession of 2008 and the pandemic of 2020.

“You don’t realize what you’re learning at McDaniel. You don’t realize what you’re learning in a financial crisis. You don’t realize what you’re learning in a pandemic,” McKelvin says. “If you just take a second, take a breath, and make a plan, you’ll be all right.”



A THIRST FOR LEARNING A PASSION FOR COMMUNITY

Growing up on a dairy farm in Carroll County, Carrie Nevius ’16 is no stranger to hard work, overcoming challenges, and working around the clock to learn everything she could. Those are characteristics that have made her a huge asset to 1623 Brewing Company as its taproom general manager.

“I was a dairy farmer until I was 26. All through college, I worked on the farm in the morning and then went to classes starting at 9 o’clock,” Nevius says. “I love to learn and I couldn’t decide on one thing, so I studied History. I could learn about art, culture, agricultural systems, business, and our founding fathers all in one degree.”

When her family got out of the dairy industry, Nevius was looking for something else she could be equally as passionate about. “The brewing culture was that for me. It’s very seasonal, just like agriculture, and you use a lot of local ingredients,” she says. “You also meet a lot of really cool people and it’s just a really fun job.”

Nevius started out working with fellow alum Mike McKelvin in February 2019 as a regional sales manager for the young beer company. “As we grew, Mike gave me the opportunity to move within the company,” Nevius says. “I chose the taproom because it’s the best part of sales. I get to talk to people every day and see their wonderful smiles when they drink our beer.”

Of course, shortly after the taproom opened in February 2020, the state of Maryland shut down indoor service the day before one of the most important days in a brewer’s business: St. Patrick’s Day. Nevius, never one to shy away from learning new skills to overcome a challenge, immediately pivoted operations to implement curbside service. “I had online ordering and curbside up the very next day for St. Patrick’s Day,” she says. “We just kept rolling with it.”

Her quick thinking and ability to build an online store overnight is a large part of the reason 1623 survived a 13-week shutdown without having to lose a single employee.

“Our team here in the taproom is very important to me. They’re like family and I’m proud that we didn’t have to lay anybody off,” Nevius says. “A couple of our employees who have full-time jobs stepped away to provide hours for those that really needed the money. But everybody was able to come back once we opened back up, and we’re still growing.”

From a shared alma mater to shared values, it’s clear that McKelvin and Nevius have this brewing business and its role in the community figured out.

“The community we’ve built here has been phenomenal,” Nevius says. “We’ve learned so many people’s names and where they come from, and they really rallied around us. They were here as soon as we offered curbside and as soon as we reopened the doors. We wouldn’t be here without them, and they are why I come to work every day.”

Left: Taproom General Manager Carrie Nevius ’16 and Mike McKelvin ’88 share more than just a love of craft beer. Their shared alma mater, family values, and dedication to community are the heartbeat of 1623 Brewing Company.



YOU DON’T REALIZE WHAT YOU’RE LEARNING AT MCDANIEL. YOU DON’T REALIZE WHAT YOU’RE LEARNING IN A FINANCIAL CRISIS. YOU DON’T REALIZE WHAT YOU’RE LEARNING IN A PANDEMIC. IF YOU JUST TAKE A SECOND, TAKE A BREATH, AND MAKE A PLAN, YOU’LL BE ALL RIGHT.”