

## **Reopening - With Renewed Appreciation**

Around the second week of March, we started seeing the first mass closures sweeping through the country. And so began the period of staying inside while the world tried to get a grip and find a way to handle COVID-19. Over these past few months the craft alcohol industry and community have done some pretty amazing things to not only adapt and survive but to help neighbors through these hard times. We've had breweries making beers to support the service industry and offering free beer to the medical professionals on the front lines of the pandemic. Then there are the distilleries, many of which put their energy into producing hand sanitizer to help tackle the mass shortages. Now we are in June and the states are finally beginning to reopen, with Georgia being one of the first to make the push.

Since I live in Georgia, I thought it might be interesting to briefly describe first hand the reopening and the careful steps that those in the craft brewing and distilling industries are taking to safely get back up and running. I have been getting back into the fray and have had the opportunity to visit a number of breweries and distilleries. I'm pleased to report that most establishments seem to be erring on the cautious side but at the same time remaining very optimistic about the future. The people I have spoken with are excited to get back to work, make great beers and spirits and get to see customers again. And craft customers seem to be equally eager to get out and enjoy the weather, the freedom to associate – and of course great beer and whiskeys.



*Slow Pour Brewing – Lawrenceville, GA*

It is encouraging to note that many folks used the down time to think through new ways to deliver a positive customer experience in a safe manner. Schoolhouse Brewing shifted around their outside seating area to be welcoming and friendly, while at the same time socially distant. Sweetwater did the same thing with their patio and also has their staff serving customers table to table to minimize cross traffic and lines. Other breweries have removed bar stools to avoid over-crowding at the bar. There are so many creative ways of handling the reopening phases and In Georgia we are all learning from each other as we see what seems to be working best.

While there are many different re-opening strategies being employed as Georgia gets back up on its feet, I feel that one aspect of coming out of the “shelter in place” phase is consistently the same: All of us – brewers, distillers, suppliers and customers – have a strong desire to support our local businesses and jobs and maintain that sense of community which is an integral part of craft beer and spirits. One of the principal reasons that many craft breweries and distilleries started up originally was to reestablish a local market which had been largely lost to huge, internationally owned beer and spirit conglomerates. These craft brewers believed that people want to see where their beer comes from, want to play a role in supporting local jobs and want to build a feeling of closeness within their community. And they were right!



*Southern Brewing Company – Athens, GA*

With everyone's hectic lives it was sometimes easy to take the community around us for granted. Then the pandemic came and it became excruciatingly apparent how important it is for us to interact with our neighbors, families and friends. We have desperately missed those smiles, nods, quiet conversations and belly laughs. As we slowly come out of “shelter in place,” I believe we all have a renewed appreciation for just how much our local craft breweries contribute to our community – it goes far beyond just great beer.

Cheers!

Tyler Adams, Riverbend Malt House