

Diversity at 'The Plant': Diverse businesses growing together

Oak City Hemp's Shop Master Floyd Hines (left) and owner Aaron Puryear (right) display some of the hemp flower products they sell.



Oak City Hemp carries a range of products including CBD tinctures.

Oak City Hemp

Aaron Puryear and co-owner Patrick McClanahan started Oak City Hemp to help people. The shop features a wide variety of hemp and Cannabidiol (CBD) products. CBD is non-intoxicating marijuana extract that is produced from the hemp plant. Recent studies of CBD focus on the compounds potential benefits for people suffering with anxiety, epilepsy and pain. Oak City Hemp sells everything from tinctures to topicals to flower to concentrate to vapes.

"We started because there was a lot of junk CBD," Puryear said. "People were getting sick. And we had friends and family using it and benefiting from it."

Puryear believes that the new-found interest and investments in the burgeoning hemp industry will help local economies and local farmers. Puryear and McClanahan opened up shop at The Plant because, Puryear said, "the vision fit."

"The energy was right," Puryear said. "Pittsboro reached out to us with open arms. They have been really welcoming from other businesses to customers. We have had nothing but support."



Chatham Cider Works' Jim Crawford outside the Quonset hut he refurbished for the cidery.

Chatham Cider Works

Chatham Cider Works is owned and operated by Maureen Ahmad and her husband Jim Crawford, a Chatham County commissioner. The idea to make cider came from Crawford's history in Pennsylvania, where his family often made cider in the family's barn.

"Jim's uncle used to keep a barrel of cider in the family barn, so he grew up with the flavors," Ahmad said. "When Jim and I toured a local brewery (Carolina Brewing Company in Holly Springs), it occurred to me that I could do the same thing. I could make my own. At the same time I heard about orchards going fallow in the mountains, and the fierce competition in the juice market, with foreign juice pricing local producers out of the market. We decided that a local apple cider would be a good thing for us to drink, and a good thing for local growers."

The Cidery is housed in a Quonset hut, a prefabricated structure of galvanized steel having a rounded arch ceiling that was developed during World War II, that was about to be sent off to China for recycling. Crawford, who supported himself through college as a carpenter, re-purposed the building for use as a cidery.

Chatham Cider Works offers several different varieties, including Carolina Crisp, a Backyard Blend, and Highway 64, a cider aged in barrels. Chatham Cider Works products can be purchased locally at the Fair Game tasting room, Vino, Oasis, and the Chatham Market.



Chatham Cider Works' Highway 64 variety of cider is aged in barrels.

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PITTSBORO — The Plant on Lorax Lane in Pittsboro has lived many lives. Owner Lyle Estill calls it a Cold War relic. In 1986, the facility was in operation trying to manufacture a new kind of aluminum, but with the end of the Cold War, the plant closed in 1996. In 2005, the site had new life as the home of Piedmont Biofuels and Abundance, a non-profit raising awareness around social justice. But when Estill's Fair Game Beverage opened, the consumer experience at The Plant changed. The facility now boasts 12 diverse tenants, from electricians and engineers, to organic and sustainable products, to craft distillers. Estill calls the facility an eco-industrial park which also hosts the Chatham Beverage District. The Plant hosts numerous events throughout the year, often hosted by Abundance, including A Taste Of Mardi Gras, the annual Death Faire, and a Renaissance Festival.



Lyle Estill shows off Fair Game's Flying Pepper vodka, a top seller.

Fair Game Beverage

Fair Game Beverage was the brainchild of Andy Zeman, a vintner from Saxapahaw. Zeman and Estill had been talking about using alcohol for fuels when Estill managed Piedmont Biofuels.

"I said, 'Hey, man, let's make something we can drink,'" Estill said.

Fair Game Beverage started making fortified wines and now focuses on making spirits. Chatham County resident Rose Dyer runs the distillery, which produces an apple brandy, a very popular pepper vodka, and two types of rum, all of which can be found at local ABC stores as well as in the Fair Game tasting room. The tasting room hosts more than just Fair Game spirits. It also has a cider bar and North Carolina wines. The tasting room also has a "pantry" with 45 North Carolina specialty food products such as Cackalacky Spice Sauce.

"We're authentic and have an authentic experience that we offer," Estill said. "We're not a bar, we're a tasting room. A lot of times, we're a warm up act. People start here then go to Postal Fish or 580 Craft Beer or the City Tap. We're the farm team for the food and beverage scene in Pittsboro."



At the Fair Game tasting room, guests can sample a variety of local spirits. Lyle Estill (left) joins Chatham County Commissioner Karen Howard (center) and Sharon Wright (right).



Copeland Springs Farm Owner Kristin Bulpitt hopes to open a kitchen at The Plant this April.



Kristin Bulpitt opened Copeland Springs Farm. She's planning soon to open The Kitchen, a new restaurant at The Plant, using food she's grown.



Copeland Springs Farms seedlings growing in one of their greenhouses.

Copeland Springs Farm

Kristin Bulpitt runs a farm at the Plant and will open Copeland Springs Kitchen in April at the site. Bulpitt grows a wide variety of vegetables, cut flowers, and shitake mushrooms at the site. She's had been going to farmers' markets, urging guests to try vegetables that were "outside their comfort zone" and decided to find a certified kitchen to make prepared items using different vegetable options. "It morphed into a business plan where there was a restaurant on the farm so that you can see where the food is grown," Bulpitt said.

Bulpitt began discussions with Estill and his wife, Tami Schwerin, about the farmland at The Plant. Bulpitt, noting the "fantastic community" the two developed at the site combined with the quality of the farmland and the space to build a commercial kitchen, decided to locate to The Plant.

"It met all my needs in a community of people who shared a lot of the same values and vision," she said. "And it compliments the other businesses."



Starrlight Mead's Ben Starr owns the business with his wife Becky. Together, their meads of earned numerous medals and awards.



Starrlight Mead's Distribution Manager Ethan Luke serves up a bit of mead in the tasting room.

Starrlight Mead

Mead is an alcohol produced from honey and is likely the oldest alcoholic drink known to man. Ben and Becky Starr opened Starrlight Mead in the Chatham Mills complex in 2010. Their meads run the gamut of flavor profiles with both sweet and dry varieties. After eight years, they ran out of space and began looking for a bigger space. Ben says he likes the "unique craft beverage experience" the plant offers. They built a new meadery at The Plant that opened late last year. The extra space allowed them to get more tanks and even a kegerator, which Ben is hoping to use to produce a lower alcohol, slightly carbonated, more approachable mead.

"When Becky and I started, we wanted to do it in a bedroom community because people want to do weekend tours," Ben said. "We found Pittsboro and fell in love--we love the people. But it's also in the center of the state so we get visitors from Charlotte to Raleigh to Fayetteville."