

# Brew Times Two

## Green Flash Brewing Co. Acquires Alpine Beer Co.

By *Lauren Lastowka*

“Let me tell you a story,” Pat McIlhenney says. “When I started out, I wanted to build a little brewery to take care of Alpine, that’s it. I was never forward-looking, I never wanted to sell.” For McIlhenney, who has run Alpine Beer Company out of a small storefront for 13 years, brewing has always been about a commitment to quality, to independence and to doing things right.

But quality attracts fans, and over time that fan base grows. Recently, McIlhenney has seen a demand for his beers that has outpaced his supply. So in November 2014, he took a step that might surprise his former self: He merged with Green Flash Brewing Co.

“Our overriding driving force was to try to answer the cry for more beer,” McIlhenney explains of the decision.

It started in November 2013, when McIlhenney was approached by Mike Hinkley, co-founder and co-owner of Green Flash, with the offer to brew three of Alpine’s beers—Hoppy Birthday, Duet and Nelson—on Green Flash’s system. McIlhenney, who had been exploring his options to increase production, agreed, and “on a handshake deal” the contract brewing started. The two breweries hit it off immediately.

“The excitement [Green Flash] employees showed when brewing our beers was pretty evident,” says McIlhenney. Hinkley agrees:

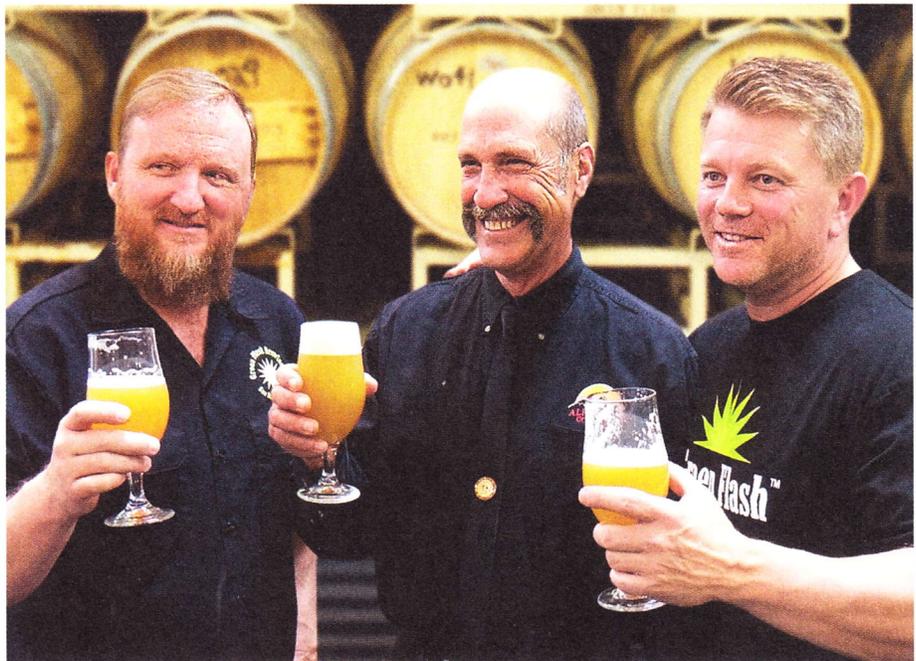


Photo courtesy of Tim Stahl for Green Flash

Left to right: Chuck Silva, Green Flash Brewing Co. Brewmaster; Pat McIlhenney, Alpine Beer Co Brewmaster; Mike Hinkley, CEO and Co-Founder Green Flash Brewing Co.

“It really energized our people.”

Soon, McIlhenney and Hinkley had the same idea: “Why don’t we make this official?”

The new arrangement allows Alpine beers to be brewed at Green Flash facilities, but also leaves a large amount of autonomy at the Alpine location, which is still operated by McIlhenney.

“Absolutely nothing changes,” McIlhenney says of his day to day. “It’s business as usual. We will still independently do our thing.”

What will change is the amount of Alpine beer that will be available, and the number of markets it will be distributed to. Green Flash will brew the three Alpine beers it started with, plus Alpine Ale, McIlhenney’s Irish Red, Captain Stout, Pure Hoppiness and Exponential Hoppiness. It will start bottling Alpine beers this spring, and distributing them to markets outside of San Diego—a first for Alpine. Green Flash will also involve McIlhenney in Cellar 3, their forthcoming barrel-aging and bottling facility in Poway, which will provide 10 times the barrel capacity for Alpine’s sour and barrel-aged beers. There will also, of course, be a collaboration beer.

As for quality, McIlhenney is satisfied. “We put on Green Flash-produced Nelson at

the [Alpine] pub—there was absolutely no perception of difference. That’s very satisfying—it tells me we are doing the right thing.”

In fact, McIlhenney seems hard-pressed to think of any downside to the arrangement.

“If everything goes the way it’s going right now, I have absolutely no reservations. We structured this so that it’s win-win for everyone—for Alpine, for Green Flash and for the public.”

Hinkley agrees. “It’s really exciting for me to help Pat and Val [McIlhenney] and the whole team over there and really be the piece of the puzzle that they were missing. It’s not like Green Flash was sitting around needing to buy a brewery to expand our operation. This is such a good fit. It’s just going to be a lot of fun for us, another way for us to grow and learn.” ☪

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*Lauren is a writer and editor based in San Diego specializing in food, craft beer, nutrition and preventive health. She serves as a manager for the health content team at American Specialty Health, and formerly served as the managing editor of Edible San Diego. She has published a craft beer column for the San Diego Uptown News and served on the volunteer board of Slow Food Urban San Diego. Explore her recently launched writing and editing firm, FlintAndSteelWords.com*