

# Three Creeks Brewing Co. to celebrate a decade of beer

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

When your signature product is beer, you should know how to throw a party. That's just what Three Creeks Brewing Co. is doing this weekend, inviting the whole Sisters community to join in a celebration of the brewer's first decade in Sisters.

The event is set for Saturday, July 21, from 2 to 8 p.m. on the expansive lawn at the Three Creeks Brewing Co. brewery and tasting room in the Sisters Industrial Park at 265 E. Barclay Dr.

"We're going to use the whole property here," said marketing manager Ashley Woody.

There will be carnival games, a dunk tank featuring chances at Three Creeks' founder and owner Wade Underwood, a 34-foot Western obstacle bounce house, a photo booth, food trucks and... of course... beer.

The renowned Central Oregon band Larry and His Flask will perform from 4 to 7:30 p.m.

"It's going to be awesome," Woody said. "I'm encouraging people to treat it like a festival."

That means bringing out a lawn blanket and/or low

chairs and making a day of it.

The celebration is designed to be a whole lot of fun — but it marks a decade of hard work, determination and the grit to weather economic storms.

Underwood left Phoenix, Arizona, 12 years ago, determined to be his own boss after working in finance for an e-commerce firm. He'd long been interested in craft beer, and that's the field he chose. To prepare to open a brewpub in the FivePine campus, he apprenticed at a local restaurant to get a taste of the work — from bussing tables to the kitchen. He and his family and partners were "all-in," he recalled.

"If this thing doesn't go, we're done," he thought. "We're going to move in with family and start over. So — terrifying."

The timing was a little off, with the restaurant hiring in June for a July opening. Nevertheless, it worked out — and some of those first hires are still with the company. The brew pub was a hit right off the bat — but in a surprising way. Underwood's research with other pubs indicated that 65 to 70 percent of revenues would come from beer sales in the pub. Because Three Creeks Brewing Co.'s pub is a family destination,

with lots of non-drinking kids, that equation is flipped at the Sisters location.

Getting the restaurant business figured out in short order turned out to be the least of the difficulties Underwood and his staff faced. In October 2008, the bottom fell out of the economy. Underwood had a business that had a high failure rate built in — and now he was staring down the barrel of the worst economic crisis to hit the U.S. since the Great Depression.

Fortunately, he knew how to run lean — and, despite economic hardship, the craft beer world remained strong.

"We ran a lean crew and had the support of the local folks," he recalled. "The craft beer market was still doing well, even though the economy was doing horribly."

Three Creeks Brewing Co. weathered the storm, eventually opening a dedicated brewing facility in the Sisters Industrial Park. It turned out that Underwood had hit the timing right in the industry.

"I kind of thought we were late," he said, noting that there were already eight craft breweries in Central Oregon when Three Creeks started.

That turned out to be just the beginning of what the market could bear. Now there are some 35 in operation here and 6,000 nationwide, up from 1,600 in 2008.

That rapid growth can bring its own perils, serving up a strong temptation to expand too rapidly. Underwood notes that Three Creeks Brewing Co. has "continued to grow, but at a rational pace."

Operating a restaurant in a very seasonal tourist economy is challenging, too, and, like many other Sisters businesses, Underwood finds it challenging to hire when workforce housing is limited.

All of that brings



PHOTO PROVIDED

Three Creeks Brewing Co. will celebrate 10 years of beer, food and fun in Sisters this coming weekend.

Underwood around to recognizing that success is no fluke.

"We had a pretty good plan coming out, but from there... I don't know if it's a surprise, but a realization: Running a business is hard."

Which is all the greater

reason to celebrate a 10-year milestone that also acknowledges a partnership between the business and the greater Sisters community.

"Getting to engage with the community," Underwood reflected, "that's what makes this work."



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Three Creeks Brewing Co. operates a brewpub on the FivePine Campus and a brewery and tasting room in the Sisters Industrial Park.

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