

BEER BUILDS BROTHERHOOD

Plank Town Brewing Co. offers more than just great food and drink BY ANDY TSUBASA FIELD

Wooden floors, tables and ceiling beams give **Plank Town Brewing Co.** its name. At the center of the brewery, a U-shaped counter glistens in the yellow light of hanging bulbs.

Here, burgers are king. For instance, the Berry Blue Burger is an 8-ounce patty topped with strawberries, basil, arugula and blue cheese.

The microbrewery, located in Springfield, is an emerging testament to its owner's entrepreneurial experience in areas

once known for high crime rates. From the Whiteaker to downtown Springfield, Bart Caridio has witnessed more businesses move in as his breweries flourish.

Caridio moved from North Dakota to Eugene's Whiteaker neighborhood during the early '90s. In the Whit, he says, he ran an art gallery by Van Buren Street and Blair Boulevard, but at home he and his wife became interested in brewing beer.

Caridio, along with two friends, opened Sam Bond's Garage in the Whiteaker in 1995, when the Whit was known

as "felony flats" — but also for its cheap rent.

"Nobody would advertise a room to rent saying it's close to the Whiteaker neighborhood," Caridio says.

But not able to afford brewing equipment, he says, they set up a stage for live music and sold beer and food.

They went from selling pretzels to meatloaf plates and smoked salmon chowder, Caridio says. Eleven years after Sam Bond's Garage opened, Caridio founded the Axe and Fiddle Public House in Cottage Grove.

In 2013, Plank Town opened in Springfield. A year later, Sam Bond's Garage became a brewery and "the Whit" had become a name synonymous with beer.

Plank Town's neighborhood was also known for grittiness, filled with abandoned buildings and strip clubs that attracted crime.

But Caridio felt the 1907-built structure now housing the brewery had potential. He designed the building to make sure it lasted long and to pay homage to Springfield's logging past.

Caridio's success at Plank Town caught the eye of Pisgah Public Market owner, Scott Chambers, who invited him to open a branch of the tap house there. It has been operating in Pleasant Hill since last summer.

But Caridio says he feels that back in Springfield, the impact the brewery is making on the community is reminiscent of Sam Bond's in the Whit.

He says he is excited for the upcoming Cornbread Café to move in next door, and about The Washburne Café's recent remodeling.

"It took 15 years in the Whiteaker neighborhood," says Caridio. "Here, it's pretty much happened in five." ■

Plank Town Brewing Co. is open 11 am to 10 pm Monday through Thursday, 11 am to 11 pm Friday, 9 am to 11 pm Saturday and 9 am to 10 pm Sunday. Plank Town is located at 346 Main Street, Springfield. For more information, see planktownbrewing.com.



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