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Lazy Brews for Lazy Days

Story by Lindsay Mott

Kiln, Mississippi, located just miles northwest of Bay St. Louis, has long been home to those that love and make beer. Known as the moonshine capital of the world, according to legend, during the bootlegging years of prohibition, moonshine was made there secretly for many years.

Today, beer is still manufactured in Kiln, referred to as “The Kill” by locals, in large quantities but in a very legal way, at the Lazy Mag-

nolia Brewery. Lazy Magnolia is the first and only manufacturing and packaging brewery in Mississippi since prohibition and is focused on bringing a true Southern quality to all of its brews.

“Beer should fit the region where it’s being produced and consumed,” said Leslie Henderson, co-founder and co-owner of Lazy Magnolia. “It’s all about the climate, the culture, and the food.”

As Mississippi natives, she and her husband Mark, who she co-owns and founded the brewery with, know the regional factors that needed to be considered when creating different brews. Because of the warm, muggy weather in the area and the flavorful, greasy foods, Lazy Magnolia brews tend to be lighter and more able to cut through and cleanse the palette than beer in other areas.

“What we’re going to drink and enjoy drinking is completely different from what people in the Pacific Northwest would drink,” she said. “Like trying to pair red wine with the right kind of dish, you’ve got to have the right kind of combination.”

The Mississippi brewery has been bringing these Southern-style brews to the area and surrounding states since 2005. But, the idea was in the works for many years before that, even though it started out as a whim.

For Christmas 2001, Leslie gave Mark, whom she met at Mississippi State, a home-brew kit as something fun for him to do in the hopes it would become a hobby they could do together.

“It turned out to be just that,” Leslie said.

She said that she had always had a desire to start a business. Since both she and Mark are engineers, she said they knew

it needed to be something industrial. With their interest in the homebrew kit and the lack of a brewery in the state, there was a hole waiting to be filled. She brought the idea up one day, they did their research and found out that brewing is not illegal in Mississippi—although home-brewing is—and they started the process.

“You find a need that’s not being met and you do a good job of meeting it. We were in the right time at the right place,” according to Leslie.

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After spending more and more time with the homebrew kit, they realized that brewing beer and coming up with new flavors and recipes was something they really enjoyed doing.

“It’s an amazing hobby to behold. It was creating this amazing liquid out of nothing really—just common ingredients. It was magical,” Leslie said about the beginning of the home-brewing. She likened it to making wine, cheese, and other culinary arts because of the time and attention that must be paid to the brew.

Because the brewing was more than just a hobby, Henderson took the time to get a formal brewing education by participating in the American Brewer’s Guild’s course in Intensive Brewing Science and a three-month internship at Crescent City

Brew House in New Orleans, Louisiana.

As the hobby grew, Mark also began to build gadgets for the kit, making it bigger and better, more efficient and giving them more control over the processes. As in most businesses, the need for constant improvement and change was crucial, and with their engineer education and training, they were able to handle this aspect of it themselves.

“As engineers that’s what we do with our lives, so why wouldn’t we do that with our hobbies,” she said.

According to Leslie, they don’t see “lazy” as a bad word but just as a way to say that things in Mississippi are different from other areas of the country.

As they took their idea from hobby to business, Kiln was a good fit for their facility. They were already living in Kiln and realized they needed to be close to the brewery. Also, they had used the water and resources there for their test recipes, so sticking to what worked and keeping it close to home was ideal. The city’s history as a large moonshine manufacturer was also ironic and appealing.

With a location and perfect resources, the Lazy Magnolia name was founded in 2003. They feel this name is a perfect representation of the type of lifestyle lived in Mississippi. According to Leslie, they don’t see “lazy” as a bad word but just as a way to say that things in Mississippi are different from other areas of the country.

“We’re laid back. We’re not constantly go, go, go. We know

how to relax and enjoy life and that’s what we wanted to say with our beer,” she said. It also used both their initials—L and M.

With the name and mission set, Leslie and Mark acquired a facility in 2004, and the first batch was ready for the market in early 2005.

Hurricane Katrina stopped production shortly in August 2005, but they were back up and running in October of that same year. In June 2006, Lazy Magnolia spread to the rest of Mississippi and into Alabama. Now, their beer is sold in six states throughout the Southeast, and they’re not done growing.

“We have a growth plan that includes our existing territory and expanding and sending more great Mississippi beer to other states,” she said.

The next state on the list—Texas.

They’re also set to soon begin an expansion to their 10,000-square-foot facility located in the Stennis Airport Industrial Park in Kiln, where they do everything from milling to packaging. Work was scheduled to start in December and should take approximately a year. The expansion will increase the capacity of the plant by four times, according to Leslie.

“It is still a work in progress and will be for as long as it exists. There is no such thing as steady state; you’re either growing or you’re dying,” Leslie said.

Lazy Magnolia has now established itself as a steady, long-term brewing facility for the state and the region. Lazy Magnolia is also considered a craft beer, which, according to Leslie, means that it is made using traditional techniques, in small quantities,

and is independently owned.

They have six steady brews currently advertised, and produce seasonal brews as well. Their original brew, Southern Pecan, is made with whole roasted pecans and won a Bronze Medal in the 2006 World Beer Cup in the Specialty Beer category.

According to Leslie, they also continue to work on creating new recipes and brews.

“We’re trying to make sure that there’s something special out there all the time now,” Leslie said. She likened this to a chef coming up with crazy, new ideas in the kitchen. She said she always thinks: “What do I want this liquid to be? What do I want to pair it with?”

Leslie believes that you really can’t say that one beer is better than another—it’s just that one beer may fit a situation more appropriately than another beer.

“There’s a place for all beers. Every beer has a purpose,” she said.

Besides just brewing beer, Lazy Magnolia encourages their customers to drink responsibly by supporting these types of campaigns, including DrinkIQ, and by following the Brewer’s Association Marketing and Advertising Code in their advertising and communication.

“We make beer to be enjoyed. This is not something that you get your hands on to get messed up,” Leslie said. She likened beer to any other good food that should be consumed in moderation.

Besides this type of responsibility, Lazy Magnolia also tries

to focus on environmental responsibility. They practice what they call side-streaming—instead of creating a waste stream, they turn it into something other people want and can use. Through this process they give spent grains to a local hog farmer as feed, spent yeast to a local cattle farmer as feed, and spent beer to be used in watering fields and in waste treatment plants. They also recycle their cardboard. By being environmentally conscious, they’re also being economically conscious and more efficient, according to Leslie.

This side-streaming and environmental responsibility also benefits the local community, whose support, Leslie acknowledged, has played a big part in their success. She said the community members of Kiln rolled out the welcome mat and have embraced them since day one. “No business will survive, much less thrive, without the support of the local community,” she said. Without this local support, Leslie tells me, they couldn’t last.

In the last eight or so years, Lazy Magnolia has come a long way. Leslie, Mark, and their family have put a lot of work into this venture, but so far, it has paid off and become the hobby they never dreamed it could be.

“I wake up feeling like the luckiest person in the world everyday,” Leslie said. “Even when something is broken, I can’t think of anything I would rather be doing more.”

There are brewery tours every Saturday at 10:30 a.m. All ages are welcome and no appointment is needed. 