

Small Business Spotlight:
Dave Brimacombe | CEO
Wayward Distillery, Est. 2016

Life Story

Dave's first career was in the Canadian Armed Forces and Air Force. The military supported him to think about what he wanted to do after completing his service. His travels had helped refine his palate with rum from Jamaica, beer from Belgium and wine from France; and Dave decided he wanted to become a distiller. When he left the service, he opened Wayward Distillery in Courtenay.

What motivated you to start your own business?

I knew it was time to start my distillery when B.C. shifted regulations around craft distillers. I had always wanted to make something with my own hands and provide value to the community that wasn't connected to the military. I knew that if I acted quickly with the new distiller regulation, I would have first mover advantage. I was also interested in food security and self-reliance in food production, so using B.C. honey in my operations was a great fit.

What has been your biggest lesson learned about being your own boss?

One of the biggest lessons that I learned from being the boss is that success comes from the team, but I am responsible for any failure. Without a team, the job doesn't get done, and if they aren't doing the job, that is because they don't have the required tools. We can be leaders of change, but we do that with our community, not despite them.

What are some of the challenges of operating a distillery in a smaller community?

Logistics are difficult being in a small remote community and it's even harder because we are on an island. We also contend with intermittent boil water advisories, water use restrictions and coastal storms. I have found that I need to reconcile my offerings to the needs of the community. Anyone who operates in a smaller community needs to listen to the people who are around them.

How has your business been impacted by and adapted to COVID-19?

To begin with, we had to lay off almost the entire team. We shifted to making hand sanitizer to boost sales but quickly realized there was a much larger need for the product, so we started to donate it. Soon, we received requests for hand sanitizer from hospitals, fire departments, essential businesses and police.

The demand was so high that I was able to hire my staff back and also add some employees. I created temporary workspaces and we made and delivered sanitizer. My core business of spirits was shredded, but I was able to meet an important community need by manufacturing sanitizer and I put everything I had into it.

What supports have you used during COVID-19 that you have found helpful?

The biggest support was our community. People and businesses donated materials, time and money to support our effort to provide sanitizer. We used the Canadian Emergency Business Account program at

the beginning of the pandemic. We also had two youth work with us as part of the Canada Summer Jobs Program.

What advice do you have for companies in the liquor and foodservice sector in these uncertain times?

Define your market and focus on it, whether it is your neighbourhood, village, region or province. In addition, businesses need to adapt operations considering the COVID-19 pandemic might be with us for a while. We just need to keep our focus on doing our best so that we can keep meeting the demand for food, liquor and other products as the situation changes.

The Bottom Line:

- Wayward Distillery employs ten people, six of them full-time.
- Wayward Distillery plans to rebrand and retool their offerings to rebuild out of the ashes of the pandemic.
- Wayward Distillery is engaged in pollinator support and proposes to increase this activity.