



Kelly Pickard, Alewife

If Kelly Pickard and Jamie Burket could bottle advice, they would have a lucrative sideline to their new business. Following several years of research that included networking with successful women, they plan to open Alewife, a craft beer bottle shop and tasting room, in early February.

The opening in Jacksonville's trendy Five Points area will be the realization of a dream the business partners had after meeting through mutual friends in Washington, D.C., where they worked. They considered such cities as Asheville, Athens and Savannah before deciding on Jacksonville, largely because of its growing reputation as a hot spot for craft breweries. That both have family ties to Northeast Florida is a bonus.

"We realized that Jacksonville was going to be a real opportunity and bring us closer to family," said Pickard.

They also took advantage of a strong support system to guide them through the complex process of start-up entrepreneurship.

"These ladies did their homework up in D.C. to know who to tap into when they got to Jacksonville," said Pat Blanchard, director, Jacksonville Women's Business Center (JWBC). "With how much preliminary research they had done, they were poised for potential success."

As she does with all initial clients, Blanchard counseled them on the importance of having a solid business plan and shared information on local resources that support women business owners. Having attended seminars through SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) in Washington, Pickard and Burket continued to seek mentoring in Jacksonville. They credit the Small Business Development Center at the University of North Florida with providing significant assistance with their business plan and start-up funding. Additionally, Women Business Owners of North Florida president Vicky Zelen, founder and president of Zelen Risk Solutions, Inc., advised them on insurance programs that include liquor liability.

"Welcoming new businesses to Jacksonville and getting to know them on a personal level is important," said Zelen, herself a graduate of several JWBC programs.

"Things we didn't think were important were so important. Once we had a strong business plan, developers and bankers took us seriously," said Pickard, praising local mentorship services. "The JWBC as a resource has been really helpful. Being able to sit down and talk to people about what to expect has been invaluable."

Not a brewery, Alewife is a retail beer shop that will offer classes and workshops—"a cultural center for beer," Pickard explained.

Alewife, where customers will be able to open bottles and drink beer while they shop, will feature hundreds of handcrafted ales and lagers from craft breweries across North American, including Jacksonville.

Impressed by a San Francisco beer store with an extensive selection and option to open bottles on site, Pickard later worked at a bar in D.C. to further her craft beer education while employed in sustainability project management for an architectural trade association. Meanwhile Burket, who has a professional background in facility management, event operations and marketing, was cultivating her own passion for the craft beer industry.

“About the same time Jamie and I discussed how cool it would be to open our own business,” Pickard said.

Over the next few years they reached out to bottle shops and other resources for the knowledge they needed to take the plunge.

“A big driver for us was education,” said Pickard, a Cicerone certified beer server and home brewer. “Drinking craft beer took me to another level, for example, better understanding styles of beer and pairing beer with food. You can have the longest list of beer available, but if no one knows what they are they become overwhelmed and default to what they had.”

Fascinated by the history of beer, the partners named their business after the medieval European alewives, women who brewed domestic beer. Alewives hung a broom, known as an ale-stake, above the door to let people know beer was for sale.

After moving to Jacksonville in October 2013, the owners sought a business location in a walkable neighborhood that has a strong sense of community. “Riverside has that,” said Pickard of their 1035 Park St. location in the former Riverside Liquors building. It’s their desire that the Alewife concept will complement Jacksonville’s current craft beer breweries, restaurants and bars that are becoming acclaimed throughout the Southeast.

“There is no doubt in my mind that they will want to reach back out and take one or more of our programs,” said Blanchard of Jacksonville’s mentoring opportunities for women business owners.

“I encourage women to seek these resources,” Pickard said. “I know we wouldn’t have had as strong a business plan without them.”