

CIVILIAN LIFE

# Toast to Veterans

Cheers to these veteran-owned craft breweries

By Lisa A. Beach

WHETHER YOU'VE SERVED our country or you want to support those who did, these veteran-owned breweries around the country offer camaraderie and a place to connect over a cold craft beer:

MAN OVERBOARD BREWING CO.

San Antonio

After 30 years and 12 duty stations in the U.S. Navy, **Ron Merriman** retired, and together with his son, Justin, and their wives, opened Man Overboard Brewing Co. The brewery honors both Ron's career and the Navy's rich heritage.

Located near The Pearl, San Antonio's trendy historic district, the brewery leaned hard into the Navy theme, with beers named for ships, nautical themes and terms — such as a recent release, "Weavy" named after the USS West Virginia (BB-48).

"One of our goals is to start conversations, even among family members, about military service," says Merriman, noting that many people know their relatives served in the military but don't know what they did or where they served. "We encourage them to do some family research or ask questions. Most veterans are honored to share their stories and past."



MAN OVERBOARD BREWING CO.

NORTHERN PINE BREWING  
Oceanside, Calif.

It's a familiar story, but what started as a passion for home brewing transitioned into a commercial venture.

In 2012, several friends collaborated to brew a special batch of give-back beer honoring seven fallen Marines.

Working with local brewer Mother Earth Brewing Co., Marine veterans **Aaron Ortega**, **Bobby Parsons** and **Levi Schaljo** brewed 310 gallons of tribute beer named "Homage." With the help of volunteers, they bottled, hand-labeled and distributed more than 450 bottles to the squadron and families of the fallen. They sold the remainder at a private event, with proceeds helping to pay for the soldiers' funeral costs and purchasing shadow boxes for families to display their loved one's medals.

Parsons, Ortega and his wife, Anne, officially opened Northern Pine Brewing in 2017. "Pouring and sharing a beer with fellow veterans will never stop filling our metaphorical glasses," says Ortega, noting the difficulty of losing that camaraderie once you leave the military. "For us, having a house to connect active-duty military and veterans is immensely important in keeping our community connected."



NORTHERN PINE BREWING



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**TWOGUYS BREWING**  
Wyoming, Mich.

**Tom Payne** began his homebrewing journey more than 25 years ago and founded TwoGuys Brewing in 2018 as a passion project after retiring from the Marine Corps.

The brewery (housed in a former firehouse) and the taproom (housed in a former 7-Eleven) craft and serve a mix of beers, hard seltzers and ciders alongside a menu of scratch-made food. Payne, who grew up just a few doors away, created this cozy space as a welcoming neighborhood gathering spot. This “brewery-with-a-heart” participates in a variety of community events, ranging from collecting donations for local schools to raising funds for the American Cancer Society.

“We give back to many organizations that serve our local area, including 92 for 22, an organization raising awareness of the 22 veterans who commit suicide daily in the U.S.,” Payne says. “We believe it’s the right thing to do. If you can, you should.”

EXPERIENCE GRAND RAPIDS

**CALLSIGN BREWING COMPANY**

North Kansas City, Mo.

Founded in 2017 by Air Force veterans **Steve Sirois** and **Morris Loncon**, Callsign taps into the owners’ military background and ongoing efforts to honor heroes. Not far from downtown Kansas City, the brewery dedicates each new batch of craft beer to the call sign of lost military aircraft.

“This pays tribute to the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice,” says Sirois, “because every call sign has a story to share and a face to remember.”

Callsign also conducts fundraisers to benefit heroes-related causes. It has raised money to benefit the families of a fellow member of Sirois’ squadron who was murdered and a firefighter who died from throat cancer, as well as providing 16 service dogs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder through Missouri Patriot Paws, Sirois says.



CALLSIGN BREWING COMPANY



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VETERANS UNITED CRAFT BREWERY  
Jacksonville, Fla.

**Ron Gamble**, a former naval flight officer, turned his wife’s gift of a beer-making kit into a thriving business led by eight U.S. military veterans. The taproom, adorned with military memorabilia and artwork, features beers with unique names or designs that pay homage to military units or initiatives. Veterans United recently teamed with The Fire Watch, a community-based program aimed at helping to end veteran suicide in northeast Florida. “Veteran suicide is such a big issue in our community,” says Gamble, who’s seen first-hand the dramatic effects PTSD has on some of the vets he’s met. The brewery earned a Veterans Safe Place designation from The Fire Watch by educating, training and empowering staff to identify and support veterans in crisis. “We’ve found that many vets are willing to open up and talk with others when they’re in a comfortable setting while sharing a beer with other vets,” Gamble says. Veterans United produces a limited-release WatchStander IPA. When customers scan the QR code on the label, it takes them to The Fire Watch website to learn more about its programs that aid veterans.

VETERANS UNITED CRAFT BREWERY

THE STAR SPANGLED BREWING CO.  
Clarksville, Tenn.

After 22 years of military service — including 13 in Special Forces as a Green Beret and eight combat deployments — **Josh Romaker** brought the same level of commitment to his retirement. In 2018, he opened The Star Spangled Brewing Co., now the largest microbrewery in Clarksville and the largest veteran-owned brewery in Tennessee. “From Day One, I wanted to build a brewery that made enough money to serve something greater,” says Romaker, who boasts two locations in Clarksville. Star Spangled’s website features a heartfelt note from Romaker: “Everything done at this brewery affords us the opportunity to give back to our military and first responders who have missed the births of their children, lost special occasions and were unable to be with their families on countless holidays while serving our communities and protecting our freedoms.” The brewery says it gives back to nonprofit organizations that “share our unapologetically patriotic view of America.”



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