

STRONG TEAMS, GROWING COMPANIES

MOONLIGHT MEADERY A VESTED FOR GROWTH Business Champion



CHRISTINE CALIGAN

MICHAEL FAIRBROTHER, OWNER

Michael Fairbrother tasted his first mead in 1995. It was love at first glass.

The software executive and home brewer began making his own mead, a fermented mixture of honey, water and yeast, at night in his garage. By 2009, his “moonlighting” meads were grabbing tasters’ palates and craft beverage competition awards. When one of his meads was judged Best in Show over 350 other entries from across the globe at the New England Homebrew competition, he realized this might make a worthy business venture.

He quit his software job, officially opening Moonlight Meadery the following spring. Fairbrother adds spices and fruit to create meads that appeal to his ever-changing tastes. Moonlight Meadery makes some 70 different flavors, each with its own complex character and names like Desire, Siletto, and Indulge that make clear that women are Moonlight’s target demographic.

In less than four years, the meadery has quadrupled its production and sales. From its 4,000-square-foot facility in Londonderry, Fairbrother produced 9,000 cases in 2013, with sales topping \$1 million.

“We now have capacity to make over 20,000 cases per year. We can increase the size of our fermenters to get up to 40,000 cases,” he said.

Moonlight Meadery’s distribution has also expanded across the country — and the world. The mead is now in 23 states, including California, as well as Australia. Moonlight’s meads should be in all 50 states by the end of 2014, with an antic-

ipated \$4 million in sales, Fairbrother said.

Fairbrother defines Moonlight Meadery’s success in two words: passion and determination. “I would never want to make mead that I would never want to drink,” he said.

His determination to be “the largest maker of craft meads in the world,” also spurs him. “I don’t know how to take ‘no’ for an answer,” he said. “I look at ‘no’ as an



*creating business opportunity
through innovative financing*

VESTED FOR GROWTH
offers up to \$1 million in
risk-tolerant capital to fuel expansion
of high-growth, high-margin companies.
www.vestedforgrowth.com

opportunity to be creative.”

Fairbrother gives enormous credit for Moonlight Meadery’s success to his five employees and part-time tasting-room workers. “The employees here are critical. It’s not just running the tour and tastings, it’s the entire experience,” he said.

Fairbrother said that using premium ingredients is also crucial. “I don’t look for cheaper-priced ingredients. It has to be quality first,” he said.

No business is without challenges. For Moonlight Meadery, the accessibility of quality honey is just one example. “We use more honey than New Hampshire produces,” said Fairbrother, who uses honey from ethically certified sources in Pennsylvania, as well as the Granite State. And the wholesale price of honey, recently \$2.20 a pound, is no small issue since the meadery uses some 30,000 pounds annually.

Moonlight Meadery has reached several milestones in its short history. The company was named a finalist in the 2013 Samuel Adams “Brewing the American Dream — Pitch Room” competition for small businesses. It also has displays at New Hampshire State Liquor stores throughout the state.

Fairbrother also counts distribution in Australia and California — which has exceedingly protective import laws — and gaining shelf space at all of New Hampshire’s Market Basket and Hannaford stores as important accomplishments.

But the highlight of his business, he said, is the reaction of people tasting his product for the first time. “To see the look on people’s faces when they try our mead — that’s why I keep doing this,” he said.

And as for his favorite mead? “It’s the one that’s in my glass at the time,” he answered, smiling. 🍯