



# INDIANA'S HUBER WINERY & STARLIGHT DISTILLERY

## NOW AVAILABLE IN THE MID-ATLANTIC

BY TEDDY DURGIN

There are a number of businesses in our industry that can correctly be labeled "family businesses." Huber's Orchard, Winery & Vineyards in Starlight, Indiana, is something beyond that. It is a legacy business, one that dates back to 1843 when Simon Huber settled a farm in the southern part of the Hoosier State and used his experience from his native Germany to grow fruit and make wine and brandies.

Over the decades, the farm has expanded from its original 80 acres to 700 acres today, and Huber's vision has been perpetuated through the generations of Hubers who have lived and worked the farm since. Among them is Dana Huber, Vice President of Distribution and Public Relations, and wife of co-owner Ted Huber. Ted and his first cousin, Greg Huber, are the sixth generation to run the business. And more and more beverage aficionados in the Mid-Atlantic



are coming to know their products.

"Business is business," Dana Huber remarked, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, "but family businesses are a bit different. In a family business, you will never find more passion and energy for success."

Huber gives a lot of credit to the fifth generation of the family for propelling the Hubers' operation to nationwide recognition. "What they established in the fifth generation was our agriculture, producing qual-

ity fruits and vegetables," she said. "They started and opened up a farmers' market in our small community of Starlight. They made 'pick your own' very popular here."

Then, in 1976, Indiana passed legislation allowing farmers to open up wineries. Two years later, the Huber family did just that. "That was a real turning point for our business," Dana Huber said. "All of a sudden, we began embracing what we now call 'agri-tourism.' It's become a lot more classy, a lot more publicized. 'Come out to the farm, stretch your legs, learn how we plant the crops, and how our wine-makers make the wine.'"

One of the most popular wines the Hubers' have in their outbound distribution network is Sweet Marcella. Marcella is the grandma of the current generation of Ted and Greg. It is a sweet red wine, which can be chilled. "It's our No. 1 brand not only on property, but also out in the market when it comes to wine," Dana stated (the family's wine list also includes Dana's Vineyard Sweet Traminette and Dana's Vineyard Dry Traminette).

The Hubers have more than 90 acres of vineyards. "We're one of Indiana's

“FAMILY OWNED & FARMED SINCE 1843”

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*The Starlight Distillery team: Jason Heiligenberg, Winemaker & Distiller; Christian Huber, 7th Generation family member & distiller, Ted Huber, 6th Generation Co-Owner & Master Distiller; Blake Huber, 7th Generation family member & distiller; and Jesse Williams, Distiller.*

largest estate bottled wineries," she commented, "and we make beautiful dry, semi-sweet, and sweet wines. We have over 32 wines -- ports and infusions -- on our lists here. For distribution, that list is more reserved and scaled down to ensure that whatever we put into the market, we're able to keep on the shelf."

The Indiana University graduate continued, "Of interest to your *Beverage Journal* readers, what we are distributing in the mid-Atlantic is our spirits. In 2013, Indiana gave us the ability to start producing grain spirits. Up until that year, even though we knew how to make bourbon, vodka, and gin, we were not allowed to because of our state regulations. So, in 2013, we expanded our distillery with about 15,000 square feet. Today, Starlight Distillery is producing drinks such as our Carl T. signature line of bourbon whiskeys. Carl was Ted and Greg's grandfather. So, both our flagship products represent the first names of the grandparents of the current ownership!"

Other popular products range from the 31 Stars Vodka to Simon's 1794 Gin. Regarding the latter, Huber noted, "Simon was indeed the founder of the property here in 1843, and his birth year was 1794. The names are meant to pull you

back to our heritage and our sense of place here in Starlight."

The Hubers' distributor in Maryland and The District of Columbia is Lanterna Distributors. From the outside looking in, Huber has nothing but praise for Maryland as a spirits market primed for sales. She said, "There appears to be tremendous interest there in other craft brands throughout the United States. I feel like there is a desire to learn about smaller production houses like ours. This high level of interest was one of the big reasons why starting distribution in the Mid-Atlantic made a lot of sense."

Of course, like nearly every other business, both the Huber Winery and the Starlight Distillery have had to navigate through a challenging era dominated by the COVID-19 outbreak. It certainly helps that this legacy business has been recognized as an "essential business" by the State of Indiana

since the beginning of the crisis. "We did have to pivot during those first 50 days or so in March, April, and May," Huber recalled. "We couldn't have anyone in our tasting room. We were limited with the samplings of our spirits and wines. But when we opened back up in May, we saw



tremendous visitation throughout the summer. People felt safe and secure with us. There is a lot of space here on the property. And we're signed on to the Hoosier Hospitality Promise, which shows that you are following all of the practices to ensure people are safe and all of the protocols are followed when you are here."

The Huber family has also maintained good relations in the community. Early on, they started producing hand sanitizer in the distillery. "We were able to deliver, free of charge during the first 60 days, about 15,000 gallons of sanitizer to our emergency responders, to our police officers, our nursing centers ... anyone who called us, we tried to serve their needs as best we could," Huber proudly stated.

The family has also done a number of virtual tastings. "Our single-barrel program is on fire right now!" she exclaimed. "We've had probably over 50 different bourbon groups connect with us throughout the United States. We did a virtual call just last night, with a Bethesda, Md., country club."

Through it all, the Hubers have stayed together as a family and as entrepreneurs. And they've never lost sight of priming the next generation -- the seventh -- to take over someday and continue the legacy. Dana and Ted, for instance, have two adult sons, age 24 and 22, who both have studied at wine-making colleges (Niagara College in Canada and Cornell University). Greg's children are now working in the business, too.

Dana concluded, "We plan to be in this business for a long time ... all of us!" ■

