

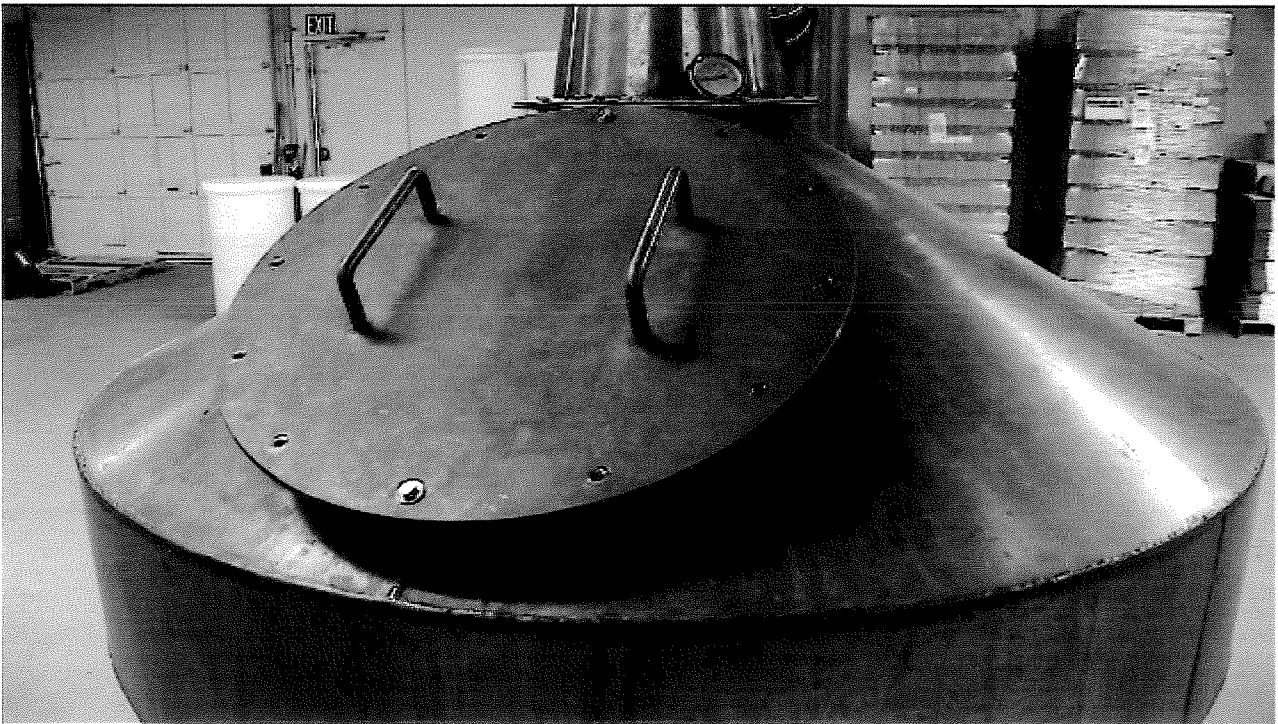
## New brewers and distillers helping stir South Bend economy

Customers might soon notice new locally produced drinks on store shelves



**Ted Land**

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### **SOUTH BEND -**

A lot gets said about South Bend being the next hub for high tech companies, scientific research labs, and state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities.

That may be the future -- but right now there are a lot of customers thirsty for something different, and some enterprising small business owners are trying to pour something new into the local economy.

“Our mantra from the very beginning is if you keep the dollars close to home, the rising tide raises all boats,”

said Charles Florance, owner of the Indiana Whiskey Company.

The corn they use is grown in Rochester, the barley comes from St. Joseph County, and their equipment was custom welded in South Bend.

"Knowing that we have essentially ten generations of sheet metal workers here in South Bend, it just made sense to use the assets we have," said Florance.

Indiana Whiskey Company is part of a new shot of excitement in the local beverage industry, which in small ways, is helping stir the economy as a whole.

"Within a year we've gone from idea to actually producing whiskey and there are a lot of other businesses here that are going to be doing the same," said Braden Weldy, operations manager.

Just down Sample Street, Crooked Ewe brewery is renovating an old VFW hall, with plans to turn it into a riverside restaurant and brewpub.

"The industry is definitely growing and craft beer, craft whiskey, craft wine, that's growing tremendously over the past few years," said Sean Meehan, co-owner.

They still have a ways to go, but hope to someday employ between thirty and fifty people.

There are, however, limits to how much this community can support.

South Bend's Drewerys Brewing Company was once the tenth largest beer producer in the country. Big name brands took over and the lager disappeared in the 70's. Now it's back, under new owners, but they're brewing it in Milwaukee.

"There's no facility in South Bend that can handle the scope of what Drewerys needs," said Dan Blacharski, Drewerys spokesman.

They're hoping that in a few years they can bring the brand home.

"What Drewerys would like to do is find an old building in or near the downtown South Bend area that might need some renovation, that we could fix up and use as a brewing facility," said Blacharski.

Back at Indiana Whiskey Company, a batch of corn mash is about to start fermenting. It should be ready for sipping in about a week.

"We all believe that there's something here in South Bend that's worth sticking around for. That's where this idea comes from. We're not willing to bulldoze and start new, we believe there's a lot of value in what's already been built, and we can harness that and do a lot of great things," said Weldy.

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