

Beverages / 10.8.13 / by Hayley Phillips

# CRAFT BREWING COMES TO NORTHERN MISSISSIPPI



Photo courtesy of Yalobusha Brewing Company

**Yalobusha Brewing Company's** (<https://www.facebook.com/YalobushaBrewing>) co-owners Mac Nichols and 'Andy' O'Bryan have high hopes for the future of craft breweries in Mississippi. As founders of Yalobusha, Northern Mississippi's first brewery since the days before prohibition, they've witnessed the change in the region's attitudes towards alcohol, seen craft beer culture gaining in popularity and watched regional legislation shift accordingly. But with no local breweries available to meet Northern Mississippi's demand, what were two businessmen on the hunt for a new project to do besides open their own brewery?

“It’s a huge geographic region that has not had a local option for beer,” says Andy. “[In] the town of Water Valley, where our brewery is located, five years ago beer wasn’t even legal.

The two stumbled upon the location for Yalobusha, when Amos Harvey, who previously worked at **Abita** (<http://abita.com/>) and has now come on board at Yalobusha, directed them towards the Historic Hendricks building in downtown Water Valley. The space, a sprawling 13,000 square foot warehouse and foundry building, became an impetus for their vision. They also managed to lure Tony Balzola, a head brewer at **McMenamins** (<http://www.mcmenamins.com/Pubs>) , down from Portland to join the project, ‘I basically pitched Mississippi as the Wild, Wild West of breweries,’ Andy says.

And things are moving along quickly for Yalobusha. Their first two beers, a pale ale and an IPA, are scheduled to launch mid October and go statewide almost immediately, with a final goal of six to eight flagship beers done year round. But Mac and Andy aren’t naive; they know that, even with all their luck thus far, there will certainly be obstacles ahead.

“Try to convince somebody who’s never had anything stronger than a Bud Heavy to drink a Porter,” laughs Mac, “now that’s a challenge.”