

# Yalobusha: raising a glass, raising for charity

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Andy O'Bryan walked through the barrel room of Yalobusha Brewing Company on Friday night, bourbon barrels full of beer to his left and newly-purchased wine barrels to his right, as a crowd gathered in the front room of the brewery for a night of tasting and live music.

O'Bryan, the owner of Yalobusha Brewing Company, laid his hand on one of the wine barrels, stained a faded purple from use, unsure of what beer would eventually be held inside.

"We're experimenting right now," O'Bryan said. "It's not one of these things where you can throw whatever beer you want in the wine barrel and know it will be good. You really need to find out which beer pairs well with this style."

In addition to finding the right barrel for his beers – he's also aiming to match each of his beers with a charitable cause by the end of the year.



The owner of Yalobusha Brewery prepared to receive customers at last Friday's Yalobusha taste tour. (Photo by: Alice McKelvey)

"Our goal for the end of 2016 is to have every single beer that we make, that goes out into the world, to be linked to a Mississippi-based charity or foundation," O'Bryan said.

O'Bryan said for the past three years, Yalobusha had always been involved in general charitable giving; but now, the company is looking into more specific causes for Mississippi.

Yalobusha currently features three beers paired with a charity or foundation: the Mississippi Blues Trail Ale, the Snopes Family Pilsner

and the Larry Brown Ale. Two percent of the revenues from each of these beers sold is given to the foundation or charity with which the beer is partnered. O'Bryan said two percent of each beer's revenue is no small chunk of change.

"Our Blues Trail Ale is in a partnership with the Mississippi Blues Commission," John Hornor, a brewer at Yalobusha, said. "We call it the official beer of Mississippi because it's the only beer affiliated with a state or government agency in the country."

The Snopes Family Pilsner gives proceeds to Oxford Chef John Currence's Move On Up Mississippi foundation, and a portion of the Larry Brown Ale revenues will benefit local fire departments in the name of the Brown family, as a tribute to the late Oxford author and firefighter.

O'Bryan said although there are plenty of excellent charities on the national stage, such as United Way or Red Cross, he decided there were some smaller causes, like local fire departments, that didn't garner as much attention as national organizations.



Andrew Bryant prepares a six pack of Yalobusha beers. (Photo by: Timothy Steenwyck)

"Most people don't think about (the smaller causes)," O'Bryan said. "People think it's a taxpayer or government-funded type deal, but if there's a shortfall, who makes up for that?"

O'Bryan said he was approached by John Currence about the possibility of tying one of the Yalobusha beers to his Move On Up Mississippi Foundation, which, according to the foundation's mission statement, aims to "inspire and fund educational youth initiatives focused on health, wellbeing and physical activity." O'Bryan said Yalobusha already had the Snopes Family Pilsner on the drawing board last year. Once Currence approached him, O'Bryan knew Snopes was a perfect fit.

Currence said he chose the name "Move On Up" came about through Currence's because he saw Mississippi at the bottom of lists that rank states in areas like obesity and education.

"The name comes from (wanting Mississippi to move up) on all lists," Currence said. "It's born out of a desire to hopefully inspire folks to break out of this sort of satisfaction with mediocrity. We continue to be mired down at the bottom of all these lists that are terrible to be at the bottom of, and at the top of all these lists that are terrible to be at the top of. We just want to secure a future for Mississippi that moves forward, that moves up and is better for the children of our state."

O'Bryan said knowing the money Yalobusha is donating stays in the state and benefits Mississippians was one of the main reasons Yalobusha began establishing partnerships with Mississippi foundations. Still, choosing which foundations to partner each beer with is no easy task, O'Bryan said.

"People would be amazed at the number of emails I get daily asking for contributions," O'Bryan said.

O'Bryan said he makes the decisions for which foundation to partner on his own, spending time in meetings with the foundations in order to get to know each one. The decision to partner the Blues Trail Ale with the Blues Commission took almost a year of meetings and consideration, but O'Bryan said his passion for the cause made the effort worthwhile.

When asked what catches O'Bryan's eye as a cause worth donating, his answer was succinct.