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Friday, 09 November 2018 06:36



The crew from Santa Fe's Honeymoon Brewery is raising a glass to the New Mexico Small Business Assistance Program and offering a hearty "salud" to David Fox of Los Alamos National Laboratories.

The cause for celebration? The successful pairing of a small-scale kombucha brewing business and a scientist at one of the nation's premier research laboratories that was made possible through the NMSBA, a free program that gives small business owners in New Mexico access to the resources available at both LANL and Sandia National Laboratory.

For Honeymoon founders Ayla Bystrom-Williams and James Hill, working with LANL's Fox allowed them to refine their brewing process and scientifically cut through a trial-and-error development process to better understand how to achieve the particular flavors they sought.

The business traces its roots back to 2011, when kombucha – a fizzy, slightly alcoholic fermented beverage made from black and green teas – was removed from store shelves after testing higher than 0.5 percent alcohol by volume.

Hill explains that is the limit for any fermented beverage which does not advertise itself as an alcoholic product and which does not require the consumer to be 21 years of age.

While many producers went back to the drawing board to modify their products to stay below the 0.5 percent threshold. Bystrom-Williams decided that she would rather offer a more robust product under a brewers license.

She approached the Santa Fe Business Incubator and officially launched the business in 2015. It was through the incubator she and Hill learned of the NMSBA and were introduced to Fox. A home brewer himself, Fox volunteered to be their principal investigator and the research into the perfect mix of microorganisms began.

“David really helped us cut out the riff raff of our original experimentation and helped us focus our attention on finding the missing pieces of our brewing puzzle,” Hill said. “When we began this journey, it seemed difficult to find accessible information and detailed contemporary research on the kombucha brewing process. Initially, that made it difficult to formulate our microbiological strategy, so to speak.

“With David’s professional expertise as a chemist, he was able to help us ask the right questions, discover important unknowns of our product and learn how to test our product thoroughly via techniques such as gas chromatography,” Hill added. “He helped introduce a more scientific approach to our process and our product analysis which, in turn, has helped us gain a more fine-tuned control over the various flavor profiles.”

Before Fox’s assistance, the brewers were struggling. Although they felt their product was tasty, it just didn’t have that “je ne sais quoi” of a well-crafted beer or kombucha, Hill said.

The NMSBA program application process was “incredible, fun and extremely empowering,” according to Hill. “Not only were we granted access to deeper knowledge about our product but we were exposed to the culture of the labs and the incredible people who work there,” he said.

The NMSBA program accepts applications year-round. To learn more, visit www.nmsbaprogram.org. For more about Honeymoon Brewery, go to www.honeymoonbrewery.com. Finance New Mexico connects individuals and businesses with skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more,

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