



NEWS RELEASE

York County Public Affairs
www.yorkcounty.gov



York County
Gail Whittaker
Public Information Officer
757-817-2665
whittgl@yorkcounty.gov

Waukeshaw
Emily Sanfratella
Chief Operating Officer
804-477-5482
emily@waukeshaw.com

Virginia Beer Company
Robby Willey
Co-Founder
757-378-2903
info@virginiabeerco.com

Beale's Building in York County to Become Second Site for the Virginia Beer Co.

Popular craft brewery in upper York County expanding to brewpub inside nearly completed structure, which Beale's developer is leasing out



August 20, 2024

The wait is over for York County residents who have eagerly anticipated what will become of the nearly completed building on Route 17 that was originally intended as a Beale's

brewpub. On Friday, The Virginia Beer Company signed a lease for the property with developer Waukeshaw, parent company of the Beale's brand.

Since 2016, The Virginia Beer Company has operated a microbrewery in The Edge District—a trendy area on the borders of Williamsburg, York County and James City County. The company's new brewpub will include not only craft beers, but a full range of locally inspired food offerings. Best of all, this location will serve as a gathering space for the community, with a family-friendly menu and an indoor/outdoor flow.

County officials said it was the exact fit they were seeking for this project, which stalled when Beale's owners had to pull away due to unforeseen family health concerns. Beale's/Waukeshaw worked diligently with the economic development staff to find a tenant that would fit their shared vision for the property.

“When we realized we could not bring our own brand to the space, we felt it our duty and responsibility to find a great tenant with the right energy,” said Emily Sanfratella, chief operating officer for Waukeshaw. “We were really impressed with The Virginia Beer Company and have followed their business for a long time. They'll be a nice addition to this part of the County.”



Beale's building near the end of construction on Route 17 in York County.

“We're grateful to the Board of Supervisors and the Economic Development Authority for their patience while we searched for the best option for this space,” said Kristi Olsen-Hayes,

director of York County’s Department of Economic and Tourism Development. “I can’t believe our luck that The Virginia Beer Company was interested. It’s opportune because they’re a known commodity—you know they’re going to bring great energy and products because they’ve already proven themselves as a huge success in The Edge District.”

“Happy to know the wait is over,” said Stephen Roane, chairman of the Board of Supervisors. “Beale’s started constructing a beautiful facility for York County to enjoy for years to come, and they committed to getting us to the end and fulfilling our vision for what would be in that space. Luckily, The Virginia Beer Company had that same vision for their second location, long before discussions began.”

The Economic Development Authority board was also highly complimentary of the tenant selection: “If it couldn’t be Beale’s, I can’t think of a better partner and a better business to go into that facility and make it succeed than The Virginia Beer Company,” said chairman Jeff Clemons. “They’re fresh off winning the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce’s 2024 Small Business of the Year Award... and we get to have them in two locations now.”

The Virginia Beer Company has also racked up plenty of previous awards and honors, both locally and through its national and global distribution:

- *2022 Excellence in Retail Award* (Food/Beverage - Peninsula), Retail Alliance
- *2021 Small Business of the Year Award*, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce
- *2020 Retailer of the Year Award* (Brewery/Winery/Distillery - Peninsula), Retail Alliance
- *2020 Gold LOVEVA Community Builder Award*, Retail Alliance
- *2018 Early Stage Business of the Year Award*, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce
- *Industry honors:* European Beer Star awards, International Beer Cup awards, Brussels Beer Challenge awards, Australian International Beer awards, Virginia Craft Beer Cup awards

What’s made The Virginia Beer Company so popular? The technical answer is, a series of smart business decisions. Co-founders Chris Smith and Robby Willey, who met as students at William & Mary, invested a full four years into planning the microbrewery—from demographic research to expert consulting to design details to, of course, beer tasting. But the business’s fun vibe, product quality and community involvement have proved its true key to success.

“We both left jobs in the financial world to move here and start a microbrewery. For those four years, our full-time job was pouring a dream,” said

Smith. “We’d go to beer festivals with blueprints. We developed a mantra of *beer, people, purpose*. Anything we do has to check at least one box, but hopefully all three.”

“We knew right out of the gate that to be successful, we had to hire someone who knew the science and chemistry and scalability of brewing,” added Willey. “Our brewmaster Jonathan Newman has been with us since before opening—we’d all talk about recipes and branding ideas.



Co-founders Robby Willey and Chris Smith, with brewmaster Jonathan Newman

Our director of sales Michael Rhodes has been here since the beginning... it's a very tenured team."

That team hopes to bring the same quality and passion to their new location, which they plan to open by Q1 2025. And unlike at the current location, where they schedule a different food truck each day so patrons can enjoy a meal with their beer, the new site will be their first chance to create a dining menu.

"We love pairing food and beer. We certainly have a passion for it, and we figured, hey, people love this beer... why shouldn't we try the same with food? But it still needs to go with The Virginia Beer Company brand identity. We're talking to people with lots of experience as we set the menu," said Willey.

They described the menu as "celebrating the area," with dishes that could be coastally inspired to reflect the vibe of the building, which itself is surrounded by famous bodies of water. The state-of-the-art kitchen will allow them to include some modern pub fare in addition to the custom creations.

"Our current location has 16 beers, with 11 that rotate on a regular basis. We use our taproom as a test kitchen, so we want that same vibe in Yorktown for both the food and the drinks," said Smith.

"They're taking the building pretty turnkey, where we had left off," said Sanfratella. "The brewery equipment is there and ready to go, the kitchen equipment is installed... all that's left are brand decisions like what does the bar look like, tables and chairs, etc. There's an outdoor bar and patio space for casual gatherings—they're going to blow that out of the water and really bring that space to life."

The new brewpub will leverage local growers, farmers' markets and seasonal foods. Everything will be handmade and locally prepared. The team wants to ensure the menu has wide enough appeal where everyone will find something they like, but that at the same time, will expand people's palettes and horizons.

"We want to give them an elevated experience that's memorable for those who come occasionally, but welcoming for regulars," said Willey. "Whether it's beer or food, the idea is that we put out a product that's exceptionally fine-tuned, but under a brand that's approachable." In addition to beer and food pairings, other alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverage options will be offered. Of course, their most popular beverages will be plentiful—including Free Verse IPA, a favorite of brewmaster Newman, who was formerly an English teacher.



Current location in The Edge District (photo credit: 360 Tour Designs)

After being grouped with Williamsburg for so many years, the brand now has an opportunity “to really plant our flag as a York County brewery,” said the founders. Indeed, The Virginia Beer Company is well known around Greater Williamsburg but now will be able to serve as a gathering spot for residents of Grafton, Tabb, Seaford, Poquoson and Gloucester.

“When the County approached us about expanding, we brought the idea to our advisors. They were all practically screaming, ‘Why *wouldn’t* you do this?’ It wasn’t just about the perfect space, or our positive relationship with Waukeshaw—we were interested because of our confidence in York County. They’ve been incredibly supportive of us here on Second Street. From financial support to promotional support to in-person visits from Jim Noel, then from Krisi Olsen-Hayes and Darren Williams... we love the fact that York County works so hard to do what’s in the best interest of the community,” said Willey.

“I love their vision and community involvement,” said Olsen-Hayes. “The Virginia Beer Company is always collaborating with and lifting other businesses, and supporting local nonprofits. Their management team serves on multiple boards. They’ve taken a leadership role in The Edge District and its success, and I have no doubt they’ll be just as visionary for lower York County. We can’t wait to see where they take it.”

About Waukeshaw

Established in 2008, Waukeshaw Development is a leading real estate firm headquartered in Petersburg, VA. With roots in adaptive reuse and a focus on oft-overlooked locales, Waukeshaw seeks out game-changing projects that drive economic revitalization and bring positive change to communities.



About York County Economic Development

York County seeks to create a diverse economic base through continually recruiting, growing and retaining business across a variety of industries. The **Department of Economic and Tourism Development** is dedicated to expanding York County's tax base through capital investment in the County; promoting tourism; supporting large, small, and home-based

businesses; and providing new employment opportunities for County residents. Its efforts result in improved quality of life throughout York County, including charitable giving, volunteerism, and job creation.

The Department of Economic and Tourism Development works in cooperation with many regional and state agencies to pursue its mission. Key among these allies are the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Hampton Roads Alliance, Hampton Roads Small Business Development Center, and local Chambers of Commerce. Its strongest ally is the **York County Economic Development Authority (EDA)**. Established in 1972, the EDA is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia and has unique powers established in the Code of Virginia. The EDA is a conduit for non-taxable industrial revenue bonds, and can legally own, develop, and sell/lease commercial real estate. It also can provide incentives necessary to close deals within targeted industry sectors.

Learn more at: www.YesYorkCounty.com.