



Classic brew returns

Narragansett Beer is once again available on the Seacoast

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Narragansett Beer has been around for 120 years but as with many classic beverages — Pabst Blue Ribbon (PBR or “Peeber” to those in the know) — for example, all things old become “hip” again, right down to the ‘50s pin-up stylings of the brew company’s “Gansett Girls.”

While the brand virtually disappeared from New Hampshire by the mid-’70s, owner Mark Hellendrung has been reviving the line since 2005 and now, in the midst of a craft beer explosion, the iconic New England brand is back. Big time.

“Big picture-wise there are imports, craft beers and the premium space,” says Hellendrung. “That’s now. Before, consumers didn’t really have that option. Narragansett has been here for generations and I thought if any region deserves to get this beer back, it’s New England.

Back in the day it had a 65 percent market share. It was part of the fabric of the culture. It was the beer of the Red Sox and at first we thought we’d get the old guys coming back to it but it’s the younger people who are buying it.”

Hellendrung went back to an original recipe for the beer, which is brewed in New York, although the company is based in Rhode Island.

“One of the first things we did was get Bill Cranston from the old brewery. He’s 80 and he remembered the recipe.”

The current Narragansett lineup includes the Lager, Light, Fest, Porter and Bock.

“It’s interesting how we’re evolving,” says Hellendrung. “When we thought of this, we wanted to bring back the great craft styles. The Porter goes back a while. We’re different from some mainstream craft beers because we have some

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heritage here but we can play with it. We want to get the foundation set. We have an opportunity to do a lot of different things both seasonal and year ‘round. We’re looking at a Banquet ale and an amber lager, but we wouldn’t do a *hefeweizen*.”

The new CEO is no stranger to producing and marketing prime beverages. Before Narragansett, Hellendrung served as president of Nantucket Nectars beginning in 1994. Following Nantucket Nectars, he served from 2003 to 2004 as interim-president of Magic Hat Brewing Co., then a 50,000 barrel craft brewer in Burlington,

Vt. Under his leadership, Magic Hat significantly increased its operating margins and experienced more than 25 percent business expansion within the year.

“Coming to the company kind of hit me on a lot of different levels,” says Hellendrung. “I love beer and that was a good fit of course. And I’m a guy who cares about

New England. And I love Rhode Island.”

Hellendrung also brought back some tried and true marketing campaigns. Back in the ‘50s and ‘60s, the ‘Gansett Good Will Team roved the bars picking up tabs. Those teams are back as well as the ‘Gansett Girls.

“We recreated all of it. On Sept. 29 we had ‘Neighbor

Day’ — we encouraged people to go out and share a ‘Gansett with your neighbor. If you look on our Web site you’ll see all of the ‘Gansett Girls and then on Dec. 29 we’ll celebrate the 120th anniversary with a big blowout in Pawtucket, R.I. It’s really come back to what it was, but we’re also moving forward. This brand deserves the faith and following it has.”