



Arielle Nathan (from left), Jaclyn Dolinsky and Ali Insinga cool off with Narragansett tall boys at Rippers bar in the Rockaways.

# BREW KID IN TOWN

By TIM DONNELLY

**C**HRIS Cruz found himself in a New York drinking dilemma.

In a world of increasingly popular craft cocktails and micro-brews, he considers himself a "die-hard cheap-beer guy." But a few years ago, he noticed his go-to brew, Pabst Blue Ribbon, was getting too pricey and "too commercial" overall.

At a neighborhood bar in Bushwick, Brooklyn, a bartender offered him a solution: a tall can of beer whose name, Narragansett, sounds like an angry New Englander coughing. He was hooked.

"PBR used to be the hipster-culture thing to do," says the 30-year-old, who now lives in Yonkers. As PBR's "cool" cachet has grown, some bars have started charging pre-



Quint (Robert Shaw) crushes a can of Narragansett while hunting sharks in "Jaws."

mium prices for it. "[PBR's] just so expensive now. Narragansett is the way to go."

The reign of PBR in NYC may finally PB-over.

In hip enclaves, Narragansett has emerged as the summertime beverage of choice. Pop by the new Riis Park Beach Bazaar in Queens, and you'll find tables full of shirtless people chugging cans of the crisp, light lager while dancing to outdoor bands. Up the beach in Rockaway, you'll see hordes of surfers and beachgoers lining up at boardwalk bar Rippers, where Narragansetts cost \$4 — cheaper than a \$5 can of Budweiser. (They're also

frequently used to make the bar's popular summer cooler, a spicy michelada.)

Beer sales tell a similar tale. In 2014, PBR's growth was less than 4 percent, while Narragansett's was up a whopping 21 percent, its eighth straight year of double-digit growth, according to the brewery. Similarly, PBR case sales over the last 12 months were down 1.3 percent, while Narragansett was up nearly 40 percent, says IRI, a Chicago-based market-research firm.

"It's not just enough for beer lovers to be marketed

**The beer of the summer is cheap, tasty, and kicking PBR in its can as the drink of choice for NYC's cool kids**

to," says Julia Herz, craft-beer program director of the Brewers Association, about why a particular brand may resonate with drinkers. "A lot of beer lovers really have to identify with the brand."

And they seem to be identifying with Narragansett, a

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# PULSE

125-year-old brewery based in Rhode Island, whose beer was once ubiquitous in New England and even had a cameo role in the 1975 film "Jaws." But the lager, known as 'Gansett to fans, had nearly vanished in recent decades until a new owner revitalized the brand in 2005.

When the beer hit New York in 2011, the timing was right: PBR in dive bars was beginning to feel passé, or at least like the punch line to a hipster joke. Not only did the new beer lack the metallic aftertaste of PBR, it exuded authenticity rather than irony.

That's part of the reason why Pine Box Rock Shop, a bar with a focus on craft beers in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn, started serving Narragansett — currently brewed at the Genesee brewery in Rochester, NY — about nine months ago.

"Everybody at the time was still carrying PBR. We're just trying to be a little different," says bar manager Alec Stephens III, who sells 'Gansett tallboys for \$4. "We pride ourselves on craft beers and we try to support local and craft breweries."

PBR is far from a craft brewery these days. The Milwaukee-born beer has frequently changed ownership, most recently, in 2014, it was bought for \$700 million by a San Francisco equity firm — which also invests in Smartwater and Compound W wart remover — and a Russian-born American entrepreneur based in Los Angeles.

Perhaps to win back its fan base, this week PBR announced plans to open a new brewery at its original Milwaukee location next summer, complete with new craft brews and nostalgia-pandering tours. (The original brewery was used as a location in the credits of "Laverne & Shirley.")

Rippers bartenders David Potes and Shaeffer Haitsma pour Narragansett beer into the bar's popular michelada mixed with lime and hot sauce.



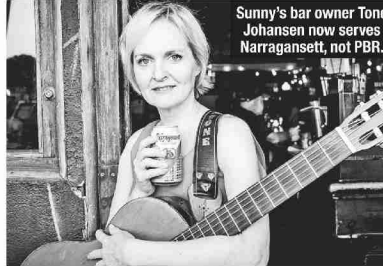
## SUMMER CHUGGIN'

“THE THINGS THAT ARE SMALLER AND KIND OF COOL GROW UP AND GET TOO BIG, AND THEY IMplode A LITTLE BIT.”

— TONE JOHANSEN, OWNER OF SUNNY'S, ON PBR

"The things that are smaller and kind of cool grow up and get too big, and they implode a little bit," says Tone Johansen, owner of Sunny's, the Red Hook, Brooklyn, waterfront dive bar, of allegiances

shifting away from PBR. After years of carrying PBR as the default cheap beer, Sunny's switched to Narragansett about a month ago. Not only did the choice make financial sense — Johansen gets



Sunny's bar owner Tone Johansen now serves Narragansett, not PBR.

a pack of 30 cans for the same price as 24 PBRs — it fit in with the bar's old-

"That's one of the things that's driving our brand: love the history and the heritage and nostalgia. Independence is a big part of that," says Hellenbrung, who hopes to move production back to Rhode Island this fall.

Of course, who knows how long the appeal of Narragansett will last or when New York will switch allegiances to another cheap beer in retro packaging.

After all, the Narragansett brand is not without its own ironies. For one, it was owned by Pabst until Hellenbrung bought it. The other might be sacrilege to some New Yorkers: It was once the official beer of the Boston Red Sox.

"That definitely makes it a head-scratcher," admits Chris O'Leary, the Brooklyn-based editor of the Brew York blog, of its local popularity.

Still, he can't argue with the crisp, refreshing taste of it, which has replaced cheap Coors Banquet cans in his fridge this summer.

"If I'm going to be grilling or outside on a hot day, it's something I want."

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### NICE CANS: A cheap-beer tale of the tap

NARRAGANSETT		PBR
1890	FOUNDED	1844
Rochester, NY	BREWED IN	Wisconsin
Providence, R. I.	BASED IN	Los Angeles
5 percent	ALCOHOL CONTENT	4.74 percent
\$4 for a 16-oz. can	AVG. NYC BAR PRICE	\$3 for a 12-oz. can
Hi, neighbor!	SLOGAN	What'll You Have?
Clams, the Red Sox	ASSOCIATED WITH	Hipsters, your grandpa
'Jaws,' 1975	AS SEEN IN	"Blue Velvet," 1986
Dr. Seuss used to draw ads for the beer	FUN FACT	PBR never actually won a blue ribbon

