



5 Seasons Brewing

It's Always Time for Great Beer and Food

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Photo by Carole Topelian

A boy whose first word was *apple* grew up to become an executive chef.

That may sound a bit too made-for-Hollywood, but David Larkworthy insists it's his true life story. "I grew up around perfectly cooked food," says Larkworthy, who is now executive chef and co-owner of 5 Seasons Brewing. "I've always loved food."

A restaurant-industry career was a natural fit. He first started working at age 12 in his father's restaurant, where Larkworthy suggests he may have done "more harm than good." Years later, in the early '90s, while working as a managing chef at the Buckhead Life Restaurant Group, he was a frequent patron of Yakitori Den-Chan (which has since closed) and met owner Dennis Lange. The two became friends, bonding over a shared love of food and beer, and developed the idea that led to opening 5 Seasons Brewing in 2001.

"We did it because we couldn't find a place to get great-quality food and beer together," says Larkworthy. "We thought it would be neat if you could do that plus have great service. That's why we invented it."

Since opening eight years ago, 5 Seasons Brewing has attracted fans and is routinely counted as one of the city's best restaurants. With the first Sandy Springs location a bona fide success, the original partners teamed with Crawford Moran to open a second location in Alpharetta. A third location opened in the Brickworks at Midtown West this spring.

"We always wanted to have a place in town," says Larkworthy. "We'd been looking about three and a half years. Brickworks seemed like a perfect match for us—there are over 300 parking places, it's an up-and-coming area with lots of green, earth-friendly companies and the landlord is trying to redevelop the area to help retain the history of this part of town rather than level it and put in skyscrapers. It fits with our philosophy."

Respecting the earth has been a core value since 5 Seasons Brewing first opened. The company's conservation efforts include using recyclable containers; recycling glass, cardboard and other materials; growing herbs on site; using electronic instead of paper-based communications whenever possible; fabricating beer taps out of old fire hydrants, sprinkler pipes and a plane wing; using waste vegetable oil to fuel the rescued Mercedes fire truck used for catering and beer events; and more.

Beer proved to offer a direct way to give back to the earth: "Every time we make beer we have a few thousand pounds of spent grain left over," says Larkworthy. Instead of adding that to the landfill, 5 Seasons Brewing's owners thought it might make useful composting material and called in the University of Georgia's agricultural department for analysis. Turns out "it's perfect material for composting," says Larkworthy. "It not only comes out of the kettle warm—170 degrees or so, which helps kick-start the compost pile—but most of the sugars are pulled out. It makes super-rich compost. In some areas where we've been dumping in a specific area of the field, the grass that grows around the area is nearly blue it's so rich." 5 Seasons Brewing has partnered with many organic farmers, providing compost to help enrich soils in exchange for vegetables and more. "Farmers like beer," says Larkworthy. "So it's a pretty happy marriage there."

Such partnerships aren't simply a feel-good situation. "From a business point of view," says Larkworthy, "the more successful local farmers are the more they produce and the more great products we'll have available to buy and use. As the economy becomes more globalized, it makes even more sense to keep a local commitment and enrich the food chain."

In his role as executive chef of 5 Seasons Brewing, Larkworthy frequents local farmers markets. "It's a normal thing for me to have an appreciation for natural foods that are grown close by," he says. "And it behooves us to buy as much as we can from as many local farms as we can." Since each 5 Seasons Brewing location typically features 20 to 30 specials a day in addition to the regular menu items, the company uses a lot of produce. The menu blends familiar favorites with creativity and is not tied to one specific culinary style, which really maximizes the ability to showcase seasonal fare.

"What we try to do is make a lot of classic dishes with new twists and feature all kinds of different ingredients, with the greatest focus on sustainable and all-natural," says Larkworthy. Everything is made from scratch.

With a third location now open, how does Larkworthy manage multiple kitchens? "I'm fortunate to work with a lot of really good people," he says. "I spend most of my time teaching and learning.



Hopefully, I'll be able to bounce around and visit everybody on a regular basis."

Each location has a unique personality. "We can morph into whatever neighborhood we're in," says Larkworthy. "This isn't a cookie-cutter restaurant; there's a lot of flexibility in what we do."

For example, every location has different beers on tap, typically between five and 10 varieties. 5 Seasons Brewing has two brewmasters: Crawford Moran, former owner/master brewer of Atlanta's Dogwood Brewing Company (which was the first microbrewery in the state of Georgia), brews at the Alpharetta and

Midtown locations; Kevin McNearney, founder of Sweetwater Brewing Company and Great American Beer Festival Brewer of the Year 2002, is at the Sandy Springs location. Some traditions are visible at each location; for example, every Thursday at 5:55 p.m. a unique fresh cask of beer is tapped.

Wine and food pairings may get all the buzz, but beer is very food-friendly. "A glass of wine has 200 to 300 discernable flavors," says Larkworthy. "Beer has 2,000 to 3,000." In keeping with the seasonality of food on the menu, the beer menu at 5 Seasons Brewing offers many lighter style and fruit flavored brews in spring and summer months. To even further maximize the compatibility between the food and beer menus, Larkworthy says that he considers which beers are on tap when planning food specials. "We strive for flavors that work together," he says.

"The thing that really sets us apart," says Larkworthy, "is that we use the best ingredients not only in our food but also in our beers. Like with anything else, when you use higher-quality ingredients you end up with a better product." And for Larkworthy, who is on the chef advisory board for Georgia Organics, better doesn't just mean taste, it also means better for the earth.

For more information visit 5seasonsbrewing.com or call 5 Seasons at The Prado in Sandy Springs at 404-255-5911; 5 Seasons North in Alpharetta at 770-521-5551; or 5 Seasons Westside in Midtown at 404-875-3232. *eMM*

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