

My Benesch My Team – Fat Head's Brewery

AUGUST 30, 2017

With its expansion to a larger facility in Middleburg Heights, Ohio, in November 2017, award-winning beer crafter Fat Head's Brewery more than doubles its former footprint and has the potential to triple its brewing capacity. Below are comments from Matt Cole, Fat Head's Co-Owner and Head Brewmaster, who worked with Benesch to secure tax incentives from the city.

Fat Head's Saloon began in Pittsburgh. How did you get involved?

I'm from Northwest Ohio, but have roots in Pittsburgh. I attended the University of Pittsburgh and worked at Pennsylvania Brewing Company while I was learning my craft. I eventually came back to Ohio, joining Great Lakes Brewing in Cleveland and Rocky River Brewing. In 2008, I approached the owner of Fat Head's, Glenn Benigni, about starting a brewpub. In 2009, we opened our brewpub in North Olmstead, Ohio, and in 2012 we started our production brewery in Middleburg Heights, right outside of Cleveland. We also have another pub in Portland, Oregon, which opened in 2014.

Tell me about your new facility.

It's a brand new building. It was vacant land there for some time, and the city was particular about what should go there. The city was looking for something that had highway appeal and could also be a destination to draw traffic and visitors from outside the area. We'd already been doing business in Middleburg Heights for about 6 years, less than a mile away, so I was familiar with the area and had already gone through some of this process before.

How did you start working with Benesch?

We were negotiating with the developer of the building and working through our lease agreements. The developer had a good relationship with the city, and we wanted to make sure we could leverage any available tax and job creation incentives. Ultimately we were able to secure a nice incentive package from the city via a TIF (tax increment financing), largely because we have a growing brand and a successful track record. The city has really embraced our brand and helped us grow-the tax abatements are a big help. Obviously we'll give back to the community and generate quite a few tax dollars. The job creation side of it is the most exciting part for me-we're going to employ 125 people, and that's exciting.

Once the incentives were in place verbally, we had to finalize the agreements with the developer and the city. I was given Benesch's name when it came time to execute those. Chris Connelly helped us draft those agreements so that the developer and city were comfortable with them and everyone felt they were getting what is fair and reasonable. It was a little different because we don't own the building and are only occupying two-thirds of it initially, which required specific verbiage that was important to have versus if we were occupying the whole building.

What do you like about working with Benesch?

They are extremely clear and concise. It was a very painless process to work with them. Chris knew all the ins and outs of what needed to happen and spoke the right language. I didn't really know exactly what I was getting into-it's funny, I would say less than a year ago I had to Google what a TIF was. Working with Benesch, there's a level of comfort knowing you have representation looking after your best interests and helping you chart a roadmap for the future.

I feel like we got lined up with the right firm in Benesch, and they got it done in a very timely fashion. The timing was critical. I didn't understand initially that until these incentives were approved in city council, construction would not start. The incentives had to be completely finalized before the developer would put a shovel in the ground. That caused a few delays, but Chris and his team were able to reconcile that so that we had an agreement very, very quickly. They were very concise, timely and thorough.

What's down the road for Fat Head's?

We're going to occupy 75,000 square feet first, but hope to occupy the entire building, 125,000 square feet, by at least year 5 or maybe sooner. We'll probably triple our current capacity, which is 33,000 barrels right now. so I'd like us get close to 100,000 barrels. And we have some other brewpub projects we're working on, so there are plenty of things we have in the works. I'm excited about the highway visibility of the new place. About 120,000 cars go by that plot of land every day.