

SAFETY PAYS for Columbus brewery



Architectural photo by Matthew Carbone

Ohio Bureau
of Workers'
Compensation's
**safety services,
grants, rebates
and refunds**
add up for
Land-Grant
Brewing Co.

By Tony Gottschlich

When Adam Benner dreamed of opening Land-Grant Brewing Co. near downtown Columbus, he imagined a place and a product that would provide a unique drinking experience for beer lovers, draw customers near and far and provide a nice living for his young family.

In the three years leading to Land-Grant's opening in 2014, the first-time entrepreneur built a business plan, a strategy for success, lined up investors and hired staff. But among the many tasks associated with starting a business, Benner said he didn't give much thought to one important component — workers' compensation coverage, a requirement under state law.

"I viewed it as another cost of doing business and more bureaucracy to deal with," said Benner, 35, a former information technology analyst in the health care and higher education industries.

Benner didn't know the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) was about more than compensating workers injured on the job. He didn't know it offered multiple programs, millions in grant dollars and numerous services designed to keep workers safe and healthy and employer premiums low.

He does now.

BWC was indeed "another cost of doing business," Benner learned. But for a startup in an increasingly crowded industry, it was a cost that would pay dividends for years to come.

**BWC pledges
\$20 million**
a year to its
Safety Grants program.



BWC Safety Consultant Specialist Molly Byrne talks to Land-Grant president Adam Benner about the brewery's Rocket Hop Infusion Pump, a device purchased with a BWC safety grant.

applied for a \$40,000 grant to help the company purchase two pieces of equipment:

- **A rocket hop infusion pump.** Stationed at ground level, the device pumps the hops through a hose to the top of the fermentation tanks, eliminating the need for ladders.
- **A can carrier adapter.** The machine receives six beers at a time on a conveyor belt and automatically applies plastic carriers at a rate of 120 per minute, eliminating the threat of repetitive stress injuries to workers.

Besides Molly, Land-Grant worked with a BWC ergonomist, an industrial hygienist, and joined a **BWC-sponsored safety council**. Made up of business groups and other safety-minded organizations, Ohio's 83 safety councils meet regularly to share information addressing occupational safety and health, workers' compensation and risk management. Active members are eligible for rate reductions on their BWC premiums.

Ohio has nearly 300 craft breweries, but few seem aware of safety grants.

Many of Land-Grant's roughly 42 employees also signed up for BWC's **Better You, Better Ohio!**™ program. Launched in early 2018, the free, paperless program provides health and wellness coaching and other resources to workers of small businesses (150 or fewer employees). The program targets employees in high-risk industries, but virtually any worker who doesn't sit at a desk all day is eligible.

"Health and safety have become part of the culture here," said Benner. "It's always on our minds."

Brewing a **SAFETY** culture

Making beer, at least on a commercial level, is hard, messy work.

From mixing ingredients to packaging the product and pushing it out the door, there's a lot of lifting, twisting and turning involved. Add wet floors, forklifts and ladders to the mix, and the potential for slips, trips, falls and injury is ever present.

So as Benner and his crew researched best safety practices for breweries, they discovered BWC's **Division of Safety & Hygiene**. The division offers several resources to help Ohio employers create a safe and healthy workplace, all for the price of their BWC premium. There's no extra charge. The idea is that greater safety means fewer workplace injuries, which means lower costs for employers, a stable, healthy workforce and steady production. Everybody wins.

Land-Grant improves safety, production with. \$40,000 grant from BWC.

BWC pledges \$20 million a year to one of the division's most effective tools, its **Safety Intervention Grants Program**. The grants provide up to \$40,000 to an employer for the purchase of equipment that substantially reduces or eliminates injuries and illnesses associated with a particular task or operation.

Interested, Land-Grant invited a BWC safety consultant to look over its operations at 424 W. Town St., a 12,000-square-foot former elevator factory in the old industrial neighborhood of Franklinton.

"I first met the Land-Grant people in March of 2017, and they were pretty savvy from the get go," remembered Molly Byrne, a 29-year veteran of BWC. "They were growing quickly, and they wanted to get ahead of safety instead of chasing it and being reactive. That's a little unusual. Most new brewers are typically focused on brewing and everything else is incidental, but Land-Grant was really on top of it."

Molly quickly determined the brewery would be an ideal candidate for a safety grant.

In the production room, she cringed at the sight of workers carrying 11- to 44-pound bags of hops up 15-foot extension ladders to pour the ingredients into large fermentation tanks. "We need to find a safer way to do this," she thought.

Over in the canning area, she watched workers apply six-pack carrying handles to freshly sealed beer cans, a process they repeated several hundred times a day for up to six hours a day, all by hand. (Carpal tunnel, anyone?)

With Molly's guidance, Land-Grant successfully



Packager Larissa Walker receives a six-pack from a device that automatically applies plastic carrying handles. Land-Grant purchased the machine with a BWC safety grant.



BWC's Molly Byrne talks to Land-Grant sustainability manager Vincent Valentino.

BWC gives back

When BWC notified Benner in 2016 that it was time for an audit, Benner braced for a grim-faced bureaucrat with a penchant for crushing spirits like empty beer cans. Instead, BWC's auditor discovered an overpayment and cut Benner a check for \$1,400.

The following year BWC issued a \$1 billion rebate to Ohio employers because of the agency's strong investment returns and fiscal management. It was the agency's third \$1 billion rebate since 2013. Land-Grant's cut: \$8,615, or two-thirds of its workers' comp premium bill the previous year.

In 2018, BWC issued another rebate, this one for \$1.5 billion. Land-Grant received nearly \$9,400.

By now Benner was starting to think BWC stood for "Back with Cash." He also found the cost of doing business with the agency hadn't cost much at all. In fact, he was clearly on the winning side of that equation.

By 2018, Land-Grant had paid BWC premiums totaling nearly \$41,000 over five years. But in rebates, refunds, program credits and the \$40,000 safety grant, BWC had given the brewery roughly \$65,000.

"This is what I mean when I talk about this agency being a force for safety and economic vitality in this state," said Stephanie McCloud, BWC's Administrator and CEO. "We want businesses to

succeed, we want their employees to be safe and healthy, and we're going to do everything we can to support those efforts."

Today, Land-Grant is Central Ohio's second largest brewery behind Columbus Brewing, according to an analysis by Columbus Business First. The brewery is on track to produce 12,000 barrels of

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beer this year and plans to expand are underway. It has a taproom at the John Glenn International Airport, and its products fill local grocery stores, bars and restaurants, sports stadiums and arenas throughout the region. OhioExplored.com ranked it the state's 9th best craft brewery in 2018.

Also noteworthy: Land-Grant hasn't suffered a single workplace injury.

"The rebate checks, the safety guidance and grant...all of that allowed us to grow while keeping the health and safety of our employees in the forefront of our minds," said Benner. "It made it much easier for us to get where we are today."



Land-Grant director of operations Mark Richards feeds six-pack carrying handles into a "can carrier adaptor" the brewery purchased with a BWC safety grant.

Forming a safety ALLIANCE

The safety culture Benner speaks of is BWC's wish for craft breweries across Ohio, an industry with more than 15,000 jobs and an economic impact of more than \$2.6 billion, according to the national Brewers Association.

The state has 298 craft breweries, more than six and a half times the number it had in 2011, according to the Ohio Craft Brewers Association. Even so, few seem to know about BWC's safety programs and grants. As of April 1 no brewery had applied for a grant in fiscal 2019, which began July 1 last year. In fiscal 2018, just three brewers applied for grants, including Land-Grant.

To spread the word, BWC teamed last fall with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and state and national brewery associations to form the Ohio Craft Brewery Alliance. The goal is to raise awareness and develop safety education and training on matters specific to the industry, such as grain handling, keg filling and chemical exposure, bottling, canning and delivery.

"Breweries face unique risks associated with material handling and difficult working surfaces as well as exposure to scalding liquids and electrical systems in wet areas," Matt Stinchfield, safety ambassador for the Brewers Association, said at the time. "The alliance will unify efforts to support safety in Ohio breweries and we are optimistic it will also reduce injuries and increase business efficiencies."

Tony Gottschlich is a writer for the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation. He can be reached at tony.gottschlich@bwc.state.oh.us.

Established in 1912, the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation is the exclusive provider of workers' compensation insurance in Ohio and serves 242,000 public and private employers. With 1,800 employees and assets of approximately \$27 billion, BWC is the largest state-run insurance system in the United States. Our mission is to protect Ohio's workers and employers through the prevention, care and management of workplace injuries and illnesses at fair rates. For more, visit www.bwc.ohio.gov.

Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation

