

Bancroft Brewing Company expanding in downtown core



By Bill Kilpatrick

Bancroft Brewing Company is moving into the old McCaskie building in downtown Bancroft, but the road to get there has been anything but easy. Bancroft This Week sat down with the owner and operator Logan Krupa to talk about how this all began and where it is going. In 2009 Logan Krupa decided on a change, he wanted to run a brewery, so he took a chance and came back to Bancroft with that goal in mind. "I literally packed up my life and moved home 15 years ago for this," said Krupa. "I was on a different path doing something different. I moved home to work at the restaurant and open the brewery. That was my plan. I never had a plan 'B'. I've been all-in since I moved home." Eventually the plan came together and the doors of Bancroft Brewing Co. opened in 2015 becoming not only the first brewery in Bancroft, but the first craft brewery in Hastings County. It was an immediate hit, people loved the beer and it's not hard to see why. Krupa puts his heart and soul into the beer and has a dedicated team, the "Brew Kru," that has helped him along the way, "You're only as good as your team," said Krupa. "The passion is there and I'm proud of my beer and I'm proud we brew it in Bancroft." He also has had a little luck along the way as well, "I'm also proud of my water," said Krupa. "We have amazing water for brewing beer. I hit the brewing lottery with the water." Between the water, the passion of Krupa and his team Bancroft Brewing took off immediately and began selling to local bars, attending beer festivals and winning awards, and eventually expanded into the LCBO. Things got so busy for Bancroft Brewing that Krupa had to contract out some of his brewing operations to a company in London just to keep up. This was a challenge said Krupa because of Bancroft's unique make up of minerals in their water. When he initially took a sample of the water to the London company so they could replicate it he was told it could not be done, "They looked at it and said we can't touch this," explained Krupa, "We can't match this," but eventually they were able to find a way. At their peak Bancroft Brewery was selling beer in 130 LCBO locations along with restaurants and bars, but given the small operation it was hard to keep up with demand, especially in the summer as he was running out of beer. "People would say to me 'That's a good problem to have,'" joked Krupa but he didn't find it very funny, "No, it's not. It sucks," he said, "I feel like such a jerk telling people we are out of beer. We just couldn't make it fast enough." It was obvious that the brewery had to expand but to where? In 2019 Krupa purchased a piece of land beside the Bancroft Inn and Suites just north of the downtown and planning began for the expansion, but like many plans in 2019, 2020 stopped them in their tracks. "When the pandemic hit things got put on the back burner for a while," said Krupa, who like so many others were now playing the waiting game. Then after the pandemic was over Krupa had to deal with the economic fallout, "After the pandemic interest rates went up and inflation hit and the economy wasn't the greatest," he said. This resulted in still more waiting in the hopes that interest rates would come down and the economy would turn around, but the recovery has been slower than Krupa expected. "At times it would get discouraging," lamented Krupa, "things were tough." While he had full intentions of building on the vacant lot things were not "rolling fast enough" due to the many hoops he had to jump through. It was at this point that the search began for an alternative to developing the

vacant property. Krupa began assessing other buildings in Bancroft and in the surrounding municipalities but none of them were suited to Bancroft Brewing's needs. "There's not many buildings in the area that are big enough," explained Krupa, "We thought we had a building in another municipality, but with the zoning and the timelines, it just wouldn't make sense." However, after assessing the McCaskie building, Krupa realized that it had everything he needed to successfully expand the brewery. "It's a very large building. It's got high ceilings and that's what we need for the big tanks," he explained, adding that "the structure is there. The hydro is there. Everything that takes time to build is there." He mentioned that there were some minor renovations that will need to take place, but the plan is to move in as soon as it's ready. After all the waiting and uncertainty the expansion is finally happening. "This plan has been in my head for years and now it's happening," exclaimed Krupa. "It's exciting. It's brought some life back into me. I'm ready to go." Krupa is not only excited about the brewery expanding but what it will mean to Bancroft's downtown and North Hastings in general. "We are creating lots of jobs, skills based jobs. We are tapping into the tourist industry. Bancroft does need businesses that create customer experiences and tourist experiences. We are trying to improve the downtown core and draw people downtown." Part of the expansion Krupa said includes a tap house, second floor entertainment, pub fare, and eventually he'd like to see some large roll up garage doors to create an indoor patio experience. Andrew Redden, the Economic Tourism and Development manager for Hastings County, knows the benefits that this move will have for Bancroft's downtown core stating, "Across Ontario and beyond, craft breweries are people magnets. They bring to your downtown the cottagers, the campers and tourists with money who are curious to try something authentic and unique to the local region. While downtown, they look for other places to spend their money. This new investment in refurbishing an existing building, combined with the Town of Bancroft's main street makeover project, makes the downtown area even more attractive and can spark further investment when others see the activity and want to be part of the action." This excitement was also shared by Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins who said, "I think it's an exciting move for both Bancroft Brewing and the town. It will inject a great vibe into the downtown core and compliments ongoing revitalization initiatives." For now Krupa is hoping to have a quick and as seamless a move as possible so that he can ensure that the disruption to beer production is minimized. He is planning on a "step process" for the move beginning with the renovations and then moving the entire operation over to the new building and installing the new 10-barrel five-vessel system that allows him to brew five to six batches per day versus his current system that only allows for one batch per day. "This will give us flexibility to do large and small batches at the same time. It's let's us have some fun experimenting and blending batches," Krupa explained. With all the uncertainty Krupa said that he had "pumped the brakes for a bit" in terms of expansion, but now that he has a location to allow him to expand he is bringing all of the brewing back in-house which will mean the pedal will be to the metal for production. Krupa is hoping to be in full production by the winter and is looking to expand into more LCBOs, grocery stores, beer stores and corner stores. "I'm excited to get to the next level," said Krupa who plans to "keep putting Bancroft on the map." Krupa wanted to thank all the people that have helped Bancroft Brewing's success so far including Hastings County, the town of Bancroft, his friends, his staff, and of course his customers who have helped him through those tough winters. But most importantly he wanted to thank his dad for all the support and help he provided, "My dad's my mentor," he said, "He taught me a lot."