



Richland Rum Ages Well in Georgia

WHO IS RICHLAND RUM?

Richland Rum is a distilling company and estate where sugarcane is sourced, fermented, distilled, aged and bottled all in-house since 1999. It is owned and operated by one family—Erik and Karin Vonk—and is America’s only single-estate rum distillery. Richland Rum ranks among very few producers solely dedicated to meticulously hand-crafting rum from pure, homegrown cane syrup in small, daily batches using artisan techniques and time-honored equipment.

THE STORY

In 1992, Erik Vonk – a Dutch immigrant who worked as a banker in the U.S. – was approached by the founder of Holland-based staffing company, Randstad, to open an office in the U.S. Erik considered cities like Boston, San Francisco and New York, but ultimately chose Atlanta because of Georgia’s thriving economic development environment, its skilled workforce and its international reach.

The firm grew rapidly and reached a turning point in 1996 when it landed a partnership with the Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta to perform all of its personnel staffing. Erik retired from Randstad in 2001 after growing the business from one office in Atlanta to a \$1.5-billion operation in 550 offices across 45 states.

Erik and his wife Karin desired to retire in a place that was “remote but still close to the world,” and found a farm near Richland, just two hours south of Atlanta.

“Stewart County is a hidden treasure,” says Erik. “There’s only one traffic light and only 120 miles between our paradise and the world’s busiest airport.”

Their dream to make rum was inspired by Erik’s grandfather, a rum connoisseur with a disdain for molasses rums. He told Erik that most rum is distilled waste, often lecturing him on the fact that more than 90% of the rum volume produced in the world is made from molasses. His grandfather’s passion for pure, authentic rum left Erik with a lingering desire to make his own.

The Vonk’s began growing their own sugarcane (which grows very well in Georgia) instead of using molasses, or worse, buying ethanol to blend with chemicals. Their

Company:

Richland Rum

Industry:

Small Business
Food Processing

What Georgia provided Richland Rum:

- Assistance in finding a distributor
- Tourism, agribusiness and trade partnerships
- International export assistance
- Continued support in expanding to other local markets

Awards:

- **Good Food Awards**
Winner, 2016
- **Declared “America’s best aged rum”**
by the Rum Gallery, May 2015
- **Los Angeles International Spirits Awards**
Gold medal recipient, 2015
- **The Fifty Best Aged Rums**
Gold medal recipient, 2015
- **International SIP Awards**
Gold medal recipient, 2014
- **Beverage Tastings Institute**
Gold medal recipient, 2014
- **“Flavor of Georgia”**
Winner, 2014
- **Recognized internationally**
with medals from Spain, Hong Kong and St. Maarten in the Dutch Caribbean



homegrown sugarcane serves as the only base ingredient in their rum.

The Vonk's began sharing their rum with friends and family and eventually caught the attention of Richland's mayor. The mayor saw the distillery as a travel destination and convinced Erik to move the distillery to downtown Richland in 2010. Richland Rum was born, and the Vonk's began selling their product commercially in October 2011.

Fast-forward six years, and the distillery, performs tours and tastings six days a week, welcoming nearly 4,000 visitors a year. From their initial investment in the restoration of a single property in downtown Richland, the owners have since expanded several times, restoring nearly an entire block of the tiny downtown.

In mid-2017 - through a partnership with the City of Brunswick and its Downtown Development Authority - Richland Rum will open a second distillery on Georgia's coast next to Sea Island. They will produce a new line of white rums solely from this location, estimating they will hire 8-10 people and serve more than 50,000 tourists a year.

Richland Rum is now distributed to several other states including Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Connecticut. They also export to various international markets including Puerto Rico, the Caribbean islands, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Germany and Japan.

HOW GEORGIA HELPED

- The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) and the Richland Downtown Development Authority (DDA) assisted the distillery in finding a distributor.
- The GDEcD Office of Tourism Product Development, the City of Brunswick, the River Valley Regional Commission and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs helped identify funding opportunities and resources to expand.
- GDEcD's International Trade team assisted in expanding exports to seven markets.
- GDEcD's Tourism division helped cement the site as an agritourism destination.
- Participated in the Georgia Food Tour, as part of Georgia Tourism's Year of Culinary in 2015, in which bottles of Richland Rum were distributed to celebrity chefs, food critics and restaurateurs.
- Member of Georgia Grown, a marketing and distribution initiative of the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

“Not only has the local community rallied around us, but the State's small business resources have been critical to our success. We've become a tourism destination, reached new international markets, worked with national media outlets and much more.”

- Erik Vonk, Owner and Founder, Richland Rum

