



## SweetWater Brewing Crafts Success in Georgia

### WHO IS SWEETWATER BREWING COMPANY?

SweetWater Brewing Company is an Atlanta-based craft brewery living by the motto “Don’t Float the Mainstream!” It was founded in 1997 by college roommates Freddy Bensch and Kevin McNerney, and has become one of the most acclaimed breweries on the East Coast. The award-winning lineup of year-round beers includes SweetWater 420, IPA, Blue, Goin’ Coastal IPA with pineapple, and Hash Session IPA.

### THE STORY

In the early 1990s, Freddy Bensch and Kevin McNerney met as roommates at the University of Colorado and discovered a mutual passion for craft beer as they worked for a local brewery on the loading docks. After finishing school, they became serious about the brewing business and moved to California to attend the American Brewers Guild to sharpen their skills.

When the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games were announced in Atlanta, Freddy followed the hype and sought to bring a West Coast-style brewery to the Southeast. With the help of friends, family and loans, the pair raised enough money to start their first brewery and began preparations to serve the hoppy, aggressive ales they’d been brewing for years. As Freddy kayaked down Sweetwater Creek in Georgia’s Sweetwater Creek State Park, the name became obvious and SweetWater Brewery officially opened for business on February 17, 1997.

It was difficult to sell craft beer in those early years, but after breaking into local bars, SweetWater began growing its large fan base, most notably with its award-winning SweetWater IPA and SweetWater 420 Pale Ale.

In 2004, SweetWater moved into a new location in Midtown Atlanta and expanded to a 115,000 square foot facility. In November 2016, a third expansion added 40,000 square feet to the operation offering, more conditioning space and a full barrel-aged facility to enjoy.

In 2017, SweetWater Brewing celebrated 20 years of making beer in Atlanta and impacting the industry nationwide. Freddy is proud to have paved the way for craft

### Company:

SweetWater Brewing Company

### Industry:

Small Business  
Food Processing

### What Georgia provided SweetWater:

- Small Business Association (SBA) loans and startup investment
- GDEcD’s Entrepreneur & Small Business team provided resources and incentives for expansion in 2013
- Currently working with GDEcD’s International Trade team to expand export market to Korea, Canada and Europe.
- State and local support for expansion of brewery from the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau, including mayor of Atlanta, Kasim Reed, and Governor Nathan Deal at ribbon cutting
- Georgia World Congress Center hosts the annual 420 Fest

### Awards:

- **Grand Champion** at US Open Beer Fest, 2012
- **Small Brewer of the Year**, Great American Beer Festival, 2002
- **Nearly 2 dozen medals** from the Great American Beer Festival and the World Beer Festival for various beers
- **River Defender Award** from Chattahoochee Riverkeeper



breweries in the South, and today the brewery employs around 180 people and sells product in 20 states. According to the Brewers Association, SweetWater is the 18th largest craft brewery in the nation.

In early 2017, SweetWater opened The Woodlands, a brand new aging facility packed with barrels and foeders dedicated to making unique and beautiful new brews. The Woodlands also serves as a new event venue on the SweetWater campus, with a myriad of options for small private tastings, seated dinners or standing receptions for up to 400 guests.

SweetWater Brewery keeps a strong focus on community and strives to give back. The brewery partners with the Chattahoochee River Keeper to work for clean water and has also worked with the Giving Kitchen on a collaborative ale that generates funds for Atlanta restaurant workers facing hardship.

Around April 20th of every year, the brewery hosts the annual SweetWater 420 Fest, which has become a popular destination for music and beer fans all over the nation. The 2017 fest is on pace to sell more than 70,000 tickets for the weekend event.

SweetWater also enjoys a partnership with Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines, who supplies their beer aboard flights nationwide. They have also just begun to export internationally, starting with Ireland with hopes to further expand their global footprint.

## HOW GEORGIA HELPED

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“Craft beer fans in Georgia love local. They appreciate knowing where their products come from and being able to visit that place. We love making that available and giving back to the community where we live and work. The city, the state and region have all embraced us and helped make us successful.”

- Freddy Bensch, Founder & Big Kahuna, SweetWater Brewing Company

