

Client Spotlight

Paddlefish Brewing Company

“When I first arrived in St. Peter. I asked myself, why doesn’t this town have a craft brewery?” Paynesville native and Gustavus Adolphus College political science senior, Eric Johnson said. “Smaller communities with no colleges have successful locally owned crafted breweries.”

Once Johnson turned 21, he and his long-time friend, Dave Long, did a weekend trip to Duluth. “There’s a craft brewery on every corner there,” Johnson chuckled. After visiting various breweries and tasting different taps, the conversation turned to starting their own brewery. “I remember Dave making the comment that a craft brewery is just a good marketing firm that sells beer, so why not take a hard look at the concept and Dave was in,” he added.

When Johnson returned to Gustavus, he shared his idea with fellow “Gustie”, Luke Dragseth. Dragseth shares an interest in mastering crafted beer. “Luke’s hometown is Milwaukee, so he’s been brewing beer since he was eight,” Johnson joked. Johnson found that Dragseth, an environmental studies senior, had a real interest in crafting beer blending ingredients that are indigenous to growing in the Midwest. With Johnson’s interest in community building, Long’s background in marketing/management and Dragseth’s interest in becoming a brew master, the genesis was set for a new brewery.

“We were full of ideas, but didn’t know where to start. One of my professors



mentioned contacting Minnesota State University, Mankato,” Johnson said. From that call, Johnson connected with the MainStreet Businesses Focused on Food and Agriculture (MBFFA) Program and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). “They were instrumental in getting us off the ground,” he added. MBFFA’s and the SBDC’s team of business consultants worked with Johnson’s team doing market research, crafting financial projections, and building the business plan. From there, they were introduced to financial programs and key leadership in the region.

Paddlefish Brewing Company of St. Peter opened in the fall of 2023. Paddlefish will be a dedicated craft brewery initially offering up to eight different taps. Locals refer to the new Paddlefish Brewery location as the old Red Owl grocery store. “It’s our intent to make this the premier historic commercial building in downtown St. Peter,” he said.

Johnson said the biggest challenge has been to stay within budget. Inflation really impacted start-up costs. Through MBFFA and the SBDC, Paddlefish is hoping to hold the line in utilizing local suppliers and sources.

“We may be Gusties who started up the hill, but St. Peter really embraced us during our time here. We really want Paddlefish to be a place for all and occasionally, you may interact with a few Gustavus alum,” Johnson said.



In 2023, the Minnesota SBDC Network helped South Central Region businesses start, manage and grow.

By the numbers:



484

Unique clients served



952

Jobs supported



6

New businesses started



\$6.1M

Capital infused



2,394

Total hours of consulting services



53%

Pre-venture clients



47%

In-business clients

South Central Region

Small Business Development Center

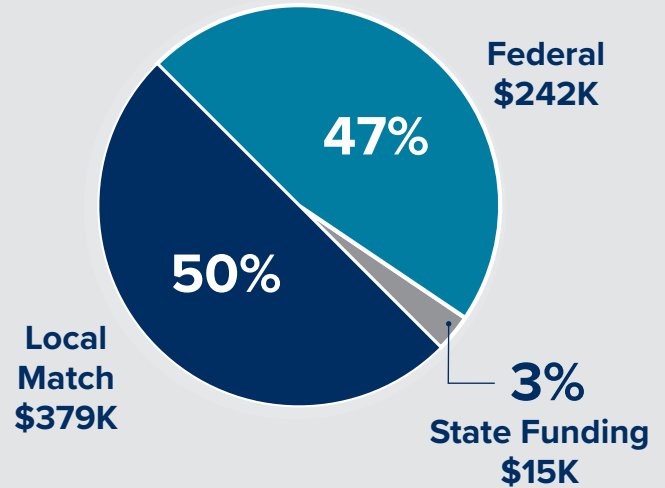


Partners in Success

Our partners share in the vision for Minnesota's business success and recognize the positive relationship between nurturing small businesses and the well-being of their communities, regions, and the state. Funding for the program comes from the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and our most important local partners—the institutions of higher learning that host our regional centers.

Other local funding partners include many community lenders, economic development organizations, corporate donors, and private individuals. We're so grateful for their incredible continuing commitment to this program. Together, we are helping businesses start, grow, and succeed.

2023 Funding



HOST INSTITUTION



South Central Regional Center



SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

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