



August 6, 2014

Michigan, craft beers and growth

Michigan is the Great Beer State and Detroit is home to some of the best products in the nation and beyond. Ranked fifth nationally, Michigan is home to more than 180 small independent brewers. Atwater Brewery is proud to belong to this growing industry, making great Michigan beers, pushing the envelope of innovation and entrepreneurship — and creating jobs, opportunity and choice for our citizens.

A key reason for our growth is the strong partnership between Atwater and Imperial Beverage. Michigan's system of alcohol regulations and safeguards ensures that both our companies collaborate, get products to markets, meet demand and work toward mutual success. In fact, it is this very partnership that has grown Atwater from a small Detroit brewery to a three-location powerhouse.

Kevin Gardner's July 29 column claiming otherwise ("[Detroit, Michigan's craft beer city](#)"), that Michigan's system impedes growth, is misleading, deceptive and untrue. This cleverly crafted op-ed spliced together a recognized brewery professional's quotes and Gardner's own agenda. We want to set the record straight: Michigan's current system is what has helped Atwater and countless small independent brewers get off the ground, compete and succeed.

Like many businesses, getting permits can be an obstacle, and is something both our businesses experience.

Gardner took a remark about permits out of context and craftily implied that it was an attack on Michigan's entire alcohol system. In fact, during the event Gardner attended, Atwater never addressed Michigan's alcohol regulations. Just cumbersome permits.

What must be stated unequivocally: Michigan's system works for the small brewery, not against it.

By keeping brewer, distributor and retailer separate and independent, Michigan's system promotes growth and competition. Distributors are the ones who invest in a qualified fleet — both human and equipment capital — and a sales force to reach every corner of our state. As Atwater's largest Michigan distributor, Imperial works tirelessly to give Atwater the best service from start to finish. Without distributors' existing infrastructure of vehicle fleets, sales force, marketing experts and more, startup breweries would take longer to get to market in any profitable quantity.

Imperial has 40 staffers in the Detroit area and another 175 throughout the rest of Michigan whose mission is to support businesses like Atwater at every level.

Ultimately, the separation of brewer and distributor under Michigan's system actually puts the tiny startup brewer on the same playing field as big beer. Gardner's appeal to deregulate Michigan's successful and proven system of alcohol distribution is based entirely on distortions and deception.

Mark Rieth, owner, Atwater Brewery, Detroit

Joe Cekola, owner, Imperial Beverage, Plymouth and Kalamazoo

<http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140806/OPINION01/308060007#ixzz3A76TKWrl>