

RI breweries see huge boom: 'People like beer and the pandemic didn't really change that'



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The Providence Journal

While the pandemic put a damper on many aspects of life in Rhode Island, the brewery industry may have come out of it with some encouraging news.

The pandemic caused some owners to pause their plans to open or expand a brewery, but it didn't cripple the industry.

In fact, according to federal employment data, the brewing industry has grown during the pandemic, adding breweries and employees and raising wages.

At the end of 2019, the state had 27 breweries, according to the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Those breweries employed a total of 251 people, who were paid an average of \$598 a week.



By the end of September 2021, the latest figures available, the number of breweries was up to 34; the number of employees, 330; and the average weekly wage, \$676.

And it's only been going up since, according to Jeremy Duffy, a founder of The Guild, a brewery that started in Pawtucket and now also has locations in Providence and Warren.

R.I. Craft Beer Week may be over, but here are 25+ breweries to try

The number of breweries in the state is now up to 38, said Duffy, who is also a member of the Rhode Island Brewers Guild, a statewide industry association.

"People like beer, and the pandemic didn't really change drinking patterns," Duffy said. "It just changed where they were drinking."

With new breweries opening and existing breweries expanding — Duffy's brewery added the Providence and Warren locations after the pandemic began — workers are in high demand, driving up wages, Duffy said.



"We're always searching for talent," Duffy said.

The industry is looking for employees ranging from highly experienced brewmasters, to those who can work production and packaging lines, to retail clerks and restaurant-type workers to serve beer and prepare and serve food, at many operations.

Employment down, wages up at other drinking, eating places

The labor statistics show the number of employees is down, but wages are up — sometimes sharply — in other places that sell alcoholic beverages, food or both.

The number of employees at "drinking places" in Rhode Island dropped about 1% from December 2019 to September 2021, according to the federal data. At the same time, average wages rose 32%, to \$478 a week.

New Trap Brew Pub locations:East Greenwich's Safehouse restaurant owners expanding to Smithfield and Narragansett

In full-service restaurants, employment fell 2%, while wages also rose 32%, to \$587.

In limited-service restaurants, employment fell 4%, and wages rose 24%, to \$440.

In liquor stores, employment fell 3% while wages rose 3%, to \$555.

Other food sellers saw increases, unless they sold gasoline

Supermarket employees, who were hailed as heroes for showing up for work when most people stayed home in the early months of the pandemic, were rewarded for their efforts.

Wages rose 9%, to \$572 a week, while stores employed 3% more people.

Iggy's is offering an Easter treat:Bunny Doughboys. Here's how to pick them up

It was a similar story at standalone convenience stores, where employment rose 31% and wages rose 10%, to \$444 a week.

But convenience stores in gas stations struggled to find workers, and 6% fewer people were employed, while wages rose 8%, to \$639 a week.

Gas stations without convenience stores struggled even more, with 13% fewer employees, while wages rose 2%, to \$693.



B&Bs get boosted while hotels lose workers

Hotels and motels saw average weekly wages rise 31%, to \$819, while the number of workers fell by 5%.

The smaller bed-and-breakfast industry — with 220 workers, compared with the hotel industry's more than 4,000 in 2021 — added 46% to its number of employees while raising wages 30%, to \$783 a week.