



With A Rebel Ale

By Rachel Armistead

Flowing this Fall 2008: On any warm Friday night in downtown Floyd, people gather at the Winter Sun Music Hall to hear the latest visiting band, while outside The Floyd Country Store impromptu bluegrass pickers turn the sidewalk into a stage.

The unexpected harmony of the two sounds turns Locust Street into a subtle and rich metaphor for the town itself. Within Floyd is a melting pot of rich tradition, blending old mountain culture with new fangled ways, while always maintaining a welcoming attitude. If Floyd were a song, the diverse assortment of farmers, artists, musicians, and artisans would be our melody.

Two people adding their notes to the melody are Brett Nichols and Ray Jones, founders of Shooting Creek Farm Brewery. Just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, down Thomas Farm Road, the two will be

hard at work creating traditional ales inspired by the methods and recipes brought to America by some of the earliest European immigrants. These early settlers brought their craft across the Atlantic from countries still known for their unsurpassed beers: Germany, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and others. Nichols and Jones, who call their products "Handmade American Farmhouse Beer," produce six distinct ales: an amber rye ale called Rebel Ale, a brown ale named Buffalo Brown, a Farmhouse Stout, a copper ale called Red Tractor, a Wildflower Wheat, and Snapping Turtle IPA.

Shooting Creek Farm Brewery was conceived three years ago over a boiling pot of grain mash. Nichols, an organic vegetable farmer from Maine, and Jones, an artist and educator from Texas, began making homebrew together back in 2004. Like most novices, they started with simple extract kits. Pretty soon they were mashing the grain themselves and experimenting with different recipes.

They also began to dream of sharing the fruits of their labor with a wider audience.

Using their friends and neighbors as guinea pigs, Jones and Nichols tested and retested their creations until they settled on six signature brews. They designed a brewhouse, tasting room, and hopyard, enlisting family, friends, and neighbors to help with the building. They started collecting equipment, much of which was used in former dairies, and organizing brewing operations. They bought ingredients in bulk—hops by the case, malted grains by the pallet.



Shooting Creek Farm Brewery joins the ranks of other Virginia "mini-microbrewery" such as Old Dominion Brewery, Blue Mountain Brewing Company, and Star Hill Brewery. Although Nichols and Jones certainly produce more beer commercially than they did as simple homebrewers, Shooting Creek Farm Brewery is very small by comparison. Dubbed a

"micro-microbrewery" by Jones, Shooting Creek only has capacity to produce 500-600 barrels a year, much less than the 10,000 barrels annually allowed for a microbrewery. Jones and Nichols will still brew each batch and seal each bottle themselves, though they have enlisted the help of Bob Sweeney, a young but knowledgeable brewer from Floyd.

Sweeney brings commercial experience to Shooting Creek, having spent several years at Dogfish Head Brewery, a popular microbrewery in Maryland known especially for their unique IPAs. Sweeney's past experience and passion for

quality beer make him a welcome addition to Shooting Creek.

The different brews available at Shooting Creek represent the diverse backgrounds of the people creating them. The Farmhouse Stout, for example, uses real maple syrup from Nichols' home state of Maine to give the beer a distinct richness. Local honey adds sweetness and floral notes to the Wildflower Wheat variety. Red Tractor, Shooting Creek's copper ale, pays homage both to the farms that surround them and the early American farm brewery tradition. Jones and Nichols have future plans to bring their flavors even closer to home with the addition of aromatic hops and select grains grown in their own fields.

The symphony of Floyd has always been unique. Out of backyard gardens and cottage industries come successful farms, bakeries, wineries, restaurants, and other businesses that truly set Floyd apart. Shooting Creek Farm Brewery is adding its own melody, where notes of local tradition and new rural spirit play in the same chord.

Shooting Creek Farm Brewery is located at 1188 Thomas Farm Road, just off the Blue Ridge Parkway at mile marker 156. The tasting room and brewhouse will be open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, 12 pm to 6 pm, or by appointment. They will sell beer in 6 packs, one-half gallon refillable growlers (with deposit), and special order kegs.

Call or visit them online for more information 540-745-8700 or visit, www.shootingcreekbrewery.com

