

B R E W S



FIRST DRAFT

By Brad Rhen

America's only metal keg is made in Pottstown

ITS NAME says it all: American Keg Co.

The Pottstown company is the only manufacturer of metal beer kegs in the United States. And new owner Scott Bentley, who bought the business in May, has plans for it to become more of a household name among craft breweries.

"I'm bullish, and I think, damn it, we should make a beer keg in America," he said. "There's no reason we should import all of our stainless steel kegs from Germany, China and a few other countries."

Bentley, who also owns VideoRay in Pottstown, which he says is the largest volume underwater robotics company in the world, purchased the company from John Giannopolous, who is also co-owner of Sly Fox Brewing Co. Giannopolous founded the company, originally known as Geemacher, in 2007. Initially, it imported kegs, and it began manufacturing them in 2015.

"John Giannopolous was looking for somebody who could put more money into it," Bentley said. "It seemed like an interesting business. Their cash situation was terrible, but the people and the potential were huge."

CEO Paul Czachor, who was a consultant for Geemacher, said the previous owner just wasn't able to invest enough money into the company.

"They needed a lot more working capital into it to expand out some of the machinery, get a lot more steel, bring on more employees," he said.

Since purchasing the company, Bentley has pumped \$1.5 million into it. He also has added five employees to bring the labor force to 20 and started a second shift. He anticipates production will soon increase from about 100 kegs a day to 200 kegs a day. Bentley said he would eventually like to double



READING EAGLE: LAUREN A. LITTLE

CEO Paul Czachor, left, and owner Scott Bentley with some kegs at American Keg Co. in Pottstown.



Brian Cassel, a quality-control specialist, finishes off some kegs at American Keg Co. in Pottstown.

that number and bring on even more employees.

While there are some com-

panies that make non-metal kegs, American is the only company in the country that makes

metal ones. Before Geemacher started making kegs in 2015, the last time an American company made metal beer kegs was 2005, Bentley said. That company was purchased by a German company, which moved production overseas.

The main reason it's difficult to make kegs in America, Bentley said, is the industry doesn't exist, so it's difficult to find the machinery and employees to start a keg-making company.

"There's no good reason we can't make beer kegs in America," Bentley said. "Are they priced competitive? Sure. Are they cheaper? No. We're still importing kegs because we can't make enough kegs in America."

Using all American steel, the company manufactures half-barrels and one-sixth barrels, which are known as sixtels. The kegs can be embossed or screen printed with the brewery's name.

The company currently sells its kegs exclusively to craft breweries. It doesn't make enough kegs to supply larger brewers like Anheuser-Busch and Miller, or even larger craft brewers like Yuengling and Sam Adams.

"There's lots of craft breweries out there buying lots of kegs, and we only got a small part of that business," Bentley said.

His ultimate goal, Bentley said, is to make as many kegs in America as he can convince breweries to buy.

"There's this opinion that German stuff is just better than American stuff," he said. "So there's a group that we won't reach. But I think most craft brewers will buy American if we can earn their business, and that means quality, custom kegs delivered when they need them."

Contact Brad Rhen: 610-371-5047 or brhen@readingeagle.com.