

**On a more positive note, COVID-19 has helped our business and our industry become more courteous towards our fellow man regarding health concerns and wellbeing.**

*Pennie Drinkard, Owner of Advanced Vision Systems, Inc.*

## **WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS, MAKE... HAND SANITIZER?**

**In normal times**, Blue Dyer Distilling Co. of Waldorf specialized in rum, whiskey, and gin. With the coronavirus pandemic spreading nationwide, and products like face masks and respirators in short supply, Blue Dyer turned to production of hand sanitizer.

"We have a federal permit that allowed us through the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, being a distilled spirits plant, to produce ethanol alcohol, which is the primary ingredient in hand sanitizer," said Walker Dunbar, co-owner of Blue Dyer Distilling.

Both Dunbar and co-owner Ryan Vierheller are former Emergency Services personnel, and once they learned anyone with a distilled spirits permit was allowed to produce hand sanitizer, they started checking around with local fire stations, police departments, EMS, and nurses who worked in hospitals. They all confirmed that their stocks of hand sanitizer were critically low. They also contacted a few hospices, and those care givers said the same.

"So, we decided, due to the immediate danger to life, health, and safety, we would immediately, or as quickly as possible, convert

all of our production capabilities to hand sanitizer," said Dunbar. That meant working 18-hour days.

Dunbar then got in contact with Charles County Emergency Management and worked closely with them. Blue Dyer will be donating hand sanitizer to them, with the first delivery coming Wednesday.

### **How can they make hand sanitizer so quickly?**

"We have the unique ability to produce hand sanitizer because, prior to this, we were able to produce the active ingredient (ethanol alcohol), and we had active fermentations that were done and completed," said Dunbar.

They are also members of the Maryland Distillers Guild, and that organization stepped up and started coordinating between them, the Maryland Brewers Association, and the Maryland Winery Association. Blue Dyer was able to work with Calvert Brewing Company in Upper Marlboro, who has donated roughly 600 gallons of beer, which they run through the distills in order to produce high concentrations of alcohol. The 600 gallons of beer produce roughly 80-100 gallons of hand sanitizer.

To start, Dunbar had to figure out the logistics of making hand sanitizer that complied with WHO guidelines specific to the COVID-19 outbreak. Another challenge was finding enough glycerin, an emulsifier. "Currently, I have 5 gallons of it, and I'm still working with the Maryland Distillers Guild to increase my supply," said Dunbar. "Another thing that's hard to find is hydrogen peroxide, but we're getting trickles of it."

The only other ingredient needed is mineralized water. So, they immediately went out and purchased all the ingredients, including containers and labels to be able to speed up the distribution of hand sanitizer to high-risk populations.

The plan is to eventually sell to the public. "Once Charles County Emergency Management and Maryland Emergency Management advises us that they are ok, we will be opening up sales to the general public," said Dunbar. "Follow us on social media. We'll post all updates there. It's the easiest way to get info out there in a timely manner."

Blue Dyer has temporarily stopped alcohol production to do this, but people can stop by to pick up bottle stills and mixers for cocktails or cocktails to go, in a sealed container in order to comply with Governor Hogan's Executive Order. They won't be delivering products because they're devoting all of their time to getting hand sanitizer out as fast as possible.

