

OL' GLORY BEVERAGES

FEEL FREE TO STAND AND SALUTE

By Teddy Durgin

Our military fight to have our flag flying high above free lands. Beverage entrepreneur Don Sessions fought to have the American flag on the bottles of his Ol' Glory-brand vodka, spiced rum, and five other spirits that are taking the Maryland-D.C. markets by storm thanks to a recent distribution deal with Atlantic Wine & Spirits.

The battle waged by Sessions, owner of an Oklahoma-based energy drink company, dates back to 2010 when the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau denied his request to design a can of beer with the flag and Pledge of Allegiance on it. Sessions contended the design was protected by the First Amendment and decided to sue the agency for millions. Fox News caught wind of his crusade and put Sessions' story on TV.

The broadcast brought more attention than Sessions could've dreamed. When he agreed to modify the label to include the disclaimer "Not endorsed by or affiliated with the U.S. or any other government," federal regulators signed off on the design. Seven years later, Sessions and his colleagues are using the label as the main marketing hook for seven promising new spirits.

The eighty-something Sessions was in ill health at the time of this interview. But his Executive Vice President **Dave Pergl**, who's worked with Sessions since Ol' Glory's inception, was happy to comment. So far, he has



been most impressed with people's emotional reaction to the product line.

"We have an Ol' Glory bus that I've been privileged to go out in with Don," he stated.

"And literally when you go down the highway, you have people waving and truck drivers blasting their horns. When we step out of our hotel in the morning and we've parked the bus outside, there's always people taking pictures of themselves in front of the bus. You can't help but catch your breath and say, 'Wow, this IS kind of neat!' It's also been a great feeling seeing all the different kinds of people take to Ol' Glory. One thing we've learned is 'Don't question who's patriotic!' It can be a guy in a Brooks Brothers suit. It can be a veteran. Or it can be a guy on the street who's 'tatted up' and with dreadlocks. You just can't judge who is patriotic."

Ol' Glory Beverages President **Jim Parisi** concurs. "The grass-roots American consumer is going to make this product, I have no doubt," the 35-year industry veteran said. "It's been exciting for both Dave and me to get involved, because we were able to develop the products, put together the packaging, craft a marketing program, and then try and secure



distribution throughout the U.S. of our seven items."

While the two men anticipate strong sales of their Victory Vodka, America's Whiskey, and R&R Red and White Wines, it's Grandpa's Moonshine that is generating perhaps the most buzz. Pergl and Parisi can't help smiling when talking about it. The former stated, "We've been amazed with the moonshine. It's basically like a 70-proof liqueur. From 22-year-olds to 72-year-olds, we pour it for them over the rocks and we get back, 'Oh my god, this is the best booze I ever had in my life!'"

Parisi added, "It's a moonshine with a honey cinnamon flavor. We've tested expert drinkers to people on the street, and everybody just seems to be drawn to it."

Ol' Glory Beverages has been generating buzz in the industry ever since its successful booth appearance at the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America convention in Florida this past April. Its distributors now range from Maryland to Minnesota to California. "We're getting a great cross-section of everybody that believe in this project," Parisi said.

And the duo is working hard to have Ol' Glory be more than just a cool bottle to have on the shelf or to serve on patriotic holidays. "There have been some really bad products over the years that use the symbol of the flag or the red, white, and blue colors," Pergl conceded. "But, historically, they do it wrong. They try and take a product that's not very good and throw red, white, and blue on it and think the consumer will buy it. You may have the sizzle. But, at the end of the day, you have to have a good steak."

Parisi concluded, "We have the steak AND the sizzle. Our products are excellent. I'd match them up to anybody's. You have to have products that people will not just buy once, but will buy again and again." ■



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