

## All's Well That Ends Ale: Animas Brew Pub Turns 10

*What was he thinking? He must have been out of his mind.* Many gloomy thoughts haunted Scott Bickert just then. His dreams to open a new family brew pub in Durango were slowly crumbling.

Bickert slumped on a barstool in the newly purchased building. All the renovations were complete. It was in an ideal location, nestled between the river trail and train tracks. Beer brewing equipment gleamed and glistened, ready for use. Giant mash tons sat empty. All he lacked now was the liquor license that would allow him to begin brewing—a process that takes weeks. If the powers that be didn't approve the license soon, he'd have nothing to serve come opening day. If his application was denied...

"This is going to be one expensive club house," he muttered.

That was Bickert ten years ago. Fast-forward to 2024, where he is perched on that barstool swapping paperwork and signatures with vendors as they drop off deliveries, strategizing schedules for his brewers, cooks, and waitstaff, and between tasks, he surveys the jolly patrons imbibing the beers and noshing their grub. The hectic bustle and merriment inside Animas Brewing Co. stokes a fire in his eyes.

"When we built this place," Scott recounts, "the atmosphere we were looking for was making it like a family pub that happens to make its own beer and nailed that. And sometimes it's real fun to sit back and see the place really busy and watch it working and think: *Wow, we created this!* People are happy and they're smiling and they keep coming back. That's what makes me the most proud."

Although ABC has secured its place among Durango's beloved breweries, it was not initially welcomed to the scene. The neighborhood opposed its opening, fearing they'd have a rowdy late-night bar where once there was a quiet bird feed mercantile. And by the time Bicker's license was approved, he was so busy brewing his first batches of beer, he had zero time to run any advertising to announce opening day.

"I thought it was going to be a nice, soft opening, but we just got destroyed!" Bickert attests.

Every year since, Bickert finds ABC regularly crammed to the gills, and always packed on the December 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He finds himself too busy to put on any kind of anniversary party, so every year he makes sure to take extra good care of the locals and regulars who pry their way in among the winter tourists.

"They're the ones who have gotten us to 10 years," Bickert says.

Bickert's brewing career kicked off in Phoenix, Arizona almost 28 years ago. He says, "Brewing was kind of a fun hobby. I started home brewing when I was 19. It's kind of the same old thing that everybody says: you can't buy beer at 19, but you can buy all the ingredients to make it. Just started home brewing occasionally and then when I recognized this could be an actual job, like a career, I found my way into the professional brewing industry in [1998]."

When he speaks about beers or the brewing process, Bickert's whole being lights up. He waxes poetic and seems as blissfully lovesick as Romeo prowling under Juliette's window. "I absolutely still love making beer! Absolutely love it! The science about it. I love beer in general. That's actually still my favorite part. If I had to give this whole place up, I'd still want to [make beer]," he declares.

Bickert and his team of brewers emphasize American-style beers. They are obsessed with tradition. They want to master the quintessence of any beer they craft, regardless of whether it's English, German, or Irish.

"It's always exploring styles, trying to get them dialed in," Bicker explains. "I'm not necessarily the peanut butter porter guy; I like to make traditional styles of beer. Try to do them as best as we possibly can and nail it."

Unlike the beers, the food menu is tied to a specific region, serving as a tribute to Cornwall, England. Bickert's family migrated to the U.S. (Michigan) via Cornwall. As such, ABC stands out for its selection of homemade and piping hot pasties. Bickert points out, "They're an old mining food; this town was built on mining. And, no one else was doing it. And I knew they paired well with beer!"

Throughout his life, Bickert's worked in breweries that span the gamut of sizes and output—from enormous operations that are ultimately bought out by international conglomerates to tiny, family-run pubs. But when he ponders the next decade for ABC, he doesn't see much that needs to change. Sure, they could always use more space, but he's yet to see the right spot arise the real estate market.

Painting the busy pub with a satisfied glance, Bickert beams, stating, "Really what I and my wife wanted was our own little neighborhood pub that happens to make its own beer. Family-friendly. And that's what we've achieved."