

Hip hops



WHERE THE BEER FLOWS

Brad Perkins will be an independent distributor, shuttling kegs in the back of his 2001 black Chevy Silverado around Rockwall, Rowlett, Garland, Sachse and parts of Plano.

His first brew will be a Texas-style pale ale — golden in color, a little sweet and a touch of hops.

Perkins will offer tours of the brewery at 11 a.m. on Saturdays, followed by a tasting in the middle room of the 2,500-square-foot warehouse space in Rowlett.

He imagines people sitting along bar stools at the long, wooden table in the room, drinking his beers while he tells them his story.

"It's a way I can differentiate myself from some of the larger breweries. You can come and actually meet the guy who brews your beer," Perkins said.

LICENSE TO BREW

Although home brewers are allowed to brew a certain amount of beer for personal consumption, those who plan to sell it must obtain a permit.

Those making a product with less than 4 percent alcohol by weight will need a manufacturer's license, and those making a product with a higher alcohol percentage will need a brewer's permit, said Carolyn Beck, spokeswoman with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission.

For more information on how to get a permit, visit tabc.state.tx.us.

DFW BREWERIES

This list includes breweries already in operation and others coming soon that have, so far, announced plans to brew.

- Deep Ellum Brewing Co., Dallas, open since November 2011
- FireWheel Brewing Co., Rowlett, coming summer 2012
- Four Corners Brewing Co., Dallas, coming Sept. 3 (Labor Day)
- Franconia Brewing Company, McKinney, open since 2008
- Lakewood Brewing Company, Garland, coming soon
- Martin House Brewing Company, Fort Worth, coming Spring 2013
- Petricolas Brewing Company, Dallas, open
- Rahr and Sons Brewing Co., Fort Worth, open since 2004



Staff photos by ROSE BACA/neighborsgo

Above: A former financial analyst, Brad Perkins has had his hands in every aspect of the production and construction of his brewing business. **Top right:** Perkins's first brew will be a Texas-style pale ale — golden in color, a little sweet and a touch of hops. **Right:** Perkins examines the beer tap handles he constructed himself with the FireWheel Brewing Co. logo.

Brad Perkins to open Rowlett-based FireWheel Brewing Co. by end of summer

By NANETTE LIGHT | nlight@neighborsgo.com

His first batch was terrible.

But he forced it down, saying he assumed that was the taste of homebrew.

His second batch, however, was epic. One of the best brews he's ever made, he said.

He still doesn't know how he did it.

"I didn't keep any recipe notes then. I just put everything together and hoped for the best," said Brad Perkins, 25, of Sachse, of his first homebrew kit. It was the stereotypical present for a beer connoisseur, given to him as a wedding present from his best man in December 2009 after a bachelor party trip to Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany.

Perkins is part of a burgeoning chain of microbrewers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area tapping into the craft beer — what Perkins proclaims as "real beer." His Rowlett-based FireWheel Brewing Co. is expected to open by the end of this summer, extending Dallas' cult follow-

ing for craft beer the farthest northeast, he said.

"It's not necessarily about drinking beer anymore," he said. "Dallas is becoming like other beer-enlightened cities like Seattle and Denver. It's more about what you're drinking than just drinking."

A former financial analyst, fate intervened for Perkins in August 2011 when he was laid off from a financial company. It was then that the Carrollton native considered the opportunity to segue his brewing hobby from his kitchen to a professional warehouse.

"I thought he was joking at first, but I knew he was looking to do something with his life where he could be happy," said Mike Garaghty of Houston, the friend who gave him the homebrew kit and sold kegerators with Perkins in college.

Friends and family tried to sway him back, but Perkins said he'd been brewing the idea even before his unemployment, stashing portions of his paycheck into his brewski fund. Perkins, who has degrees in fi-



MORE INFO:

To view a video about Brad Perkins created by neighborsgo Digital Presentation Editor Rose Baca, visit tinyurl.com/bradperkinson. To learn more about Perkins and his brew business, visit firewheelbrewing.com.

nance and business from the University of Texas at Dallas, was already planning to grow his home-based brewery from five gallons to 20 gallons at the continued request of friends and family for his craft beer.

"I figured why not take it up a level and go from large homebrew to small industrial. They say it's the American Dream to own your own business, right?"

But that upgrade wasn't just a step, it was a leap of faith.

"In the beginning, every day was a beat down, but I just had to believe it was going to happen," said Perkins of an anxious two months waiting for his manufacturer's license to be approved from the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission.

His warehouse space at 2806 Lawning Lane in Rowlett has been a construction zone since he moved in the middle of March. He's since gutted the inside — while blasting Pandora's hip hop station — to a bare shell to bring the building up to code.

Although friends have lent their help along the way, including designing the company's logo and building a long table for the tasting room, Perkins has had his hands in every layer of the business since its inception, from the brew set-up to crafting his own draft taps.

"That's Brad. If he can build it, he'll make it," said Garaghty, an electrical engineer. Perkins said he plans to bring Garaghty on as a business consultant.

Perkins laughs as he surveys the four-tank brewing system in the 2,500-square-foot warehouse, which also includes an office in the front and tasting room between.

"Most breweries spill this much beer in their production process, but it's a good starter kit for a brewery my size" he said, hugging the 210-gallon fermentation tank that arrived May 9, calling it his "baby" and what makes "his life worth living."

Perkins said he plans to quadruple the brewery's size in the next two years, and hopes to turn a profit in about 18 months.

"Once I get started, I'm not holding back," he said.

Nanette Light is editor of the Rockwall/Rowlett edition and can be reached at 214-977-8039.