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CENTERPIECE

HOT

Bloom Town hard strawberry cider is back, just in time for Apple Blossom

By MOLLY WILLIAMS The Winchester Star
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Stephen Kelly (left), cider maker at Old Town Cidery in Winchester, and David Glaize (right), Old Town Cidery co-owner, stand holding cans of Bloom Town hard cider — a special edition Apple Blossom cider that has returned for a third year of festivities.

MOLLY WILLIAMS/The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — You’ve probably seen different variations of Old Town Cidery’s hard apple cider on store shelves around town.

From honey crisp to pearsecco to raspberry and rosé, there’s an array of “tree to can” options for those in pursuit of a refreshing, locally-sourced sip.

“Our family’s been growing apples for about 100 years now,” said Old Town Cidery co-owner David Glaize. “My brother and I ... we now do a little bit of everything. But the hard cider is one avenue that’s kept us vertically integrated.”

And now, with Winchester’s beloved Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival nearing, a characteristically pink selection has, once again, joined the cidery’s standard lineup.

Dubbed “Bloom Town,” the special edition Apple Blossom cider is back for a third year of festivities, and Glaize says the product is as popular as ever.

“Funny enough, it’s actually a strawberry cider,” Glaize said. “We did that because we wanted it to be pink.”

And pink it is. Both the beverage and the can that holds it are reminiscent of the festival’s signature color scheme of pink and green.

Glaize says it’s a refreshing sipper that has gained popularity for being on the sweeter side with a lower alcohol by volume content.

“So you take the label off of it, we’ve still gotten great responses for the product inside,” he said. “You put the label on it, and I think people really resonate with that pink and green.”

The Bloom Town product is one that creates a lot of demand, with customers waiting on its release from year to year. Glaize said that this season, they’ve brewed more than they ever have before.

“It’s kind of cool. We get a lot of requests for it at other times of the year, but we just don’t do it. So it’s to kind of build demand around Apple Blossom time,” he said.

Aside from availability in stores, Glaize says people can also expect to see vendors selling the strawberry cider at different events during the 97th Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival.

The Apple Blossom Festival is special to Glaize for a number of reasons. For one, he said, as a fourth generation apple grower here in Winchester, it allows him to reflect on the festival’s origins.

“Originally the Apple Blossom Festival was a celebration for all the apple growers in the area to get together and celebrate a potential future crop,” he said. “So when an apple tree blooms, each one of those blossoms will turn into an apple. So you kind of get a feel for what your crop is going to look

like this early in the year. So the original, the true meaning of Apple Blossom was to celebrate a potential crop. And that's always kind of been special for me, trying to tie it back into the orchard side of things."

He added that since he was a child, Apple Blossom has been his "favorite holiday."

"I used to think it was a national holiday until I met someone that wasn't from Winchester, and they asked me what Apple Blossom was, and I was like, 'You don't have it?'" he said.

With his deep personal connection and affinity for Apple Blossom, Glaize said that getting more involved has been a "special project" for him. Old Town Cidery has built a partnership with the festival, even sponsoring the orchard tour and cider tasting event that took place last Saturday.

Of course, it's also been a strategic move for the Glaize brothers, as the festivities have created both demand and marketability for their products.

And all the while, Glaize has maintained his lifelong love of the Apple Blossom Festival, which makes the fruits of his family's labor all the more sweet.

"It's an incredible time of year," he said. "It's an incredible time to be a part of the Winchester community. And there's a lot of people that make it happen, and a lot of people that make it such a success. And it feels special to be a part of that."

The Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival kicks off Friday in downtown Winchester with the two-day United Bank Bloomin' Wine Fest. The Xfinity Artisan & Crafter Show will also take place downtown on Friday and Saturday.

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