

OXFORD BANK SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

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Every local business has a story worth sharing with the community. That is the belief behind Oxford Bank's "Business Spotlight" series – to shine spotlight on all of our favorite local businesses and connect businesses with their surrounding communities.

This month's spotlight is Porter's Orchard/Flint City Hard Cider.

Amanda Wilcox: What inspired you to start your business?

Ray Porter: I liked working with my dad. I got paid a nickel to sweep the floors as my first job, and I always liked being around the farm. My dad taught me well.

Charlie Burt inspired me to start Flint City Hard Cider. He helps manage the farm with me now, and has a passion for making cider; he's been doing it on his own for a few years in small batches. In 2015, we started Flint City Hard Cider, LLC, and in 2016 we purchased a building and started working on it; that building is at the corner of 3rd Avenue and MLK in the heart of downtown Flint, right across from Soggy Bottom Bar. We are working on the building and brewing cider right now.

AW: What products/services do you sell?

RP: Well, we're an orchard, so of course we have the staples: apples, cider, and donuts! In the late 90's we had to make an adjustment and go towards the entertainment aspect of the farming. So, in 2005 we purchased hay trucks, slides, and zip lines from Symanzik's Berry farm when they retired and sold their business. We started with offering hay rides and picking apples, and then put in a corn maze in 2009. Now we have so many different things, including barbecue and slushies! People don't just come to get their apples and leave anymore; it's a family event – and we want people to come and stay for a while!



Charlie Burt: We are currently featuring cider on a rotating tap at Tenacity Brewery in Downtown Flint. We are hoping that over the course of the next several months to have our own building opened and to be able to sell to the public. We will be putting in a kitchen and have take-out fusion pizzas that will be served in our tasting room. Those'll be specialty pies with unique toppings and combo's – it'll be great! We are really looking forward to seeing what the chef creates for the menu.

A majority of the apples come right from us, but we are also pulling from our local growers. We want to have ciders that you would have to go all over the world to get: Normandy, Spain, Europe, etc, but we want to have flavors like the larger cider beers as well.

We have done a lot of experimenting with lots of menu options, like duck confit pizza with a balsamic aged cheddar. We are going to be affordable while having the high-end flavors, while also showcasing that we are from Flint, we know our roots, and we aren't super fancy people . . . but we have a great palate for food and we want to bring in a lot of flavors. We plan to source local as much as we can!



AW: What's the one thing your business is known for, over your competitors? Why are you known for that?

RP: Our cider and donuts bring them back year after year, and generation after generation. People drive up from all over Michigan to get our cider.

The brewery will have a cider mill feel as well. We are the only Cider Brewing business in Flint, so we are one of a kind right now. We will be taking old cider press racks and turning them into table tops. It'll help tie our story in with the brewery; we want it to feel rustic and homey.



CB: Quality will set us apart – I consider myself one of the top cider makers in the state. I want to educate people as well. We want to tell you where it's from, what the style is, where we got our idea and palate of flavors are from. We want to help Flint stand out and be one of few in the area to do what we do.

AW: What has been your business' proudest moment? Why?

RP: The day that my dad said I could make cider as well as he did. It was my proudest moment. He let me blend the apples as I wanted to – I was in my early 20's. I didn't have his input making my batch, and he said it was as good as his. It's crazy to think I've been doing this for 44 years.

AW: What has been the biggest risk you ever took for your business? What was it, what could have gone wrong, and what was the end result?

RP: Flint City Hard Cider is our biggest risk. Everything we have invested is in this . . . it's my whole life on the line. I have a lot of faith in Charlie.

CB: My life has been on hold for a few years trying to get this up and running. There's been plenty of opportunity to hang up the boots and get out, and I just don't want to. I'm here and I'm ready to have this opened.

AW: Tell us something interesting/fun about your business.

Charlie: We handle the product from beginning to end. We are the guys planting the trees, harvesting, pressing, and brewing. The cider goes hand-in-hand with the Hard Cider; we're taking an amazing Cider and turning it into a Hard Cider. We'll have seasonal menus based on what we can get local and based on the seasonal food options.

Ray: To be able to share what God's blessed me with is a gift. This whole farm, the experience of coming out here with the family to enjoy, sharing what I love and what my family does with others . . . it's a great accomplishment and it's why I love what I do.

AW: What's your favorite product that you sell?

RP: Cider – it's hands down the best.

About the company: Porters Orchard opened the Orchard 1921. Raymond Porter, Ray Porter's grandfather, opened the orchard because he had a passion for apples. He was a machinist in Flint and had an excellent job, but he wanted to grow apples. He found a 64-acre farm in 1919, planted the first tree's in 1921, and quit his job during the depression to farm full time. All 5 of his children worked on the farm and Roger, Ray's dad, ran the farm from 1947 until he handed over the farm to his son Ray in 2000. Porters Orchard been family owned and operated since the beginning! There is a rock wall that is at the front of the orchard, and in there stands the last tree planted by Raymond Porter.

Porter's Orchard

12060 Hegel Rd, Goodrich, MI

Seasonal | Opens August 2018

Flint City Hard Cider

Downtown Flint

Opening Soon