

Kalispell brewery opens restaurant



An outdoor seating area is shown outside the restaurant at SunRift Beer Company in Kalispell on Thursday, April 23. (Casey Kreider photos/Daily Inter Lake)

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SunRift Beer Company bartender and brewer Kevin Mincheff walks between the brewery and taproom, at left, and the restaurant, right.

The SunRift Beer Company restaurant sits adjacent to the brewery and taproom in Kalispell on Thursday, April 23. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

By
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|
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There's a new ray of sunshine on the Kalispell dining scene. SunRift Beer Company opened its restaurant in late March, bringing quality bar food and a new beer to the popular downtown watering hole.

The restaurant side of the business has been in the works since the brewery first got started in 2017, but it took a little while to outfit the restaurant, located next to the SunRift tasting room, for food service.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatened to delay the much-anticipated opening even further, but at the urging of his employees, brewery owner Craig Koontz decided to "just go for it."

Even though customers aren't yet allowed to eat in the restaurant or sip a beer at the bar, SunRift is now open for takeout orders despite business closures.

The outbreak struck the valley immediately before the restaurant was planned to open, but the SunRift staff decided to go ahead with to-go orders instead of waiting even longer.

“My staff told me, ‘we can do this. We’ll figure it out,’” Koontz recalled. It was this encouragement from the restaurant’s kitchen manager, Ryan Weller, and lead “beertenders” Kevin Mincheff and Alex Stevens that convinced Koontz to proceed with the opening.

The restaurant is still working diligently to comply with social distancing guidelines, Koontz noted, as he made sure to keep a six-foot distance from an employee in the kitchen. But SunRift is also providing sandwiches and side dishes to Flathead Valley patrons during the pandemic.

“The food is just like we make the beer—classic and clean,” Koontz said. The menu is starting with a few American staples, such as tri-tip sandwiches, beer biscuits and mac ‘n’ cheese.

He added the philosophy behind the restaurant is “super hyper-focused on very simple, clean food.” Gravy is made from veal bones and their meat is smoked on a smoker using Flathead Valley cherries and apple wood.

They plan to gradually expand the menu, especially once sit-down service resumes, and feature unique weekly specials. Koontz said the restaurant’s cook, Tim Moats, has plans for a lot of “really fun, tasty food.”

SUNRIFT ALSO debuted a new beer along with the restaurant’s opening. The new brew—known as Hefty Nuts—is dedicated to the SunRift staff that has powered through the uncertain circumstances and forged ahead with the restaurant’s opening. Koontz described the coconut hefeweizen as “light, bright, tropical and refreshing.”

“It’s a tribute to the staff who wanted to open. It’s flying like hotcakes,” Koontz noted.

Opening the restaurant completes phase two of SunRift’s three-part plan to transform its downtown Kalispell location in conjunction with the development of the Kalispell downtown core trail.

Koontz said the restaurant’s location directly on the future trail was “absolutely a key part of the whole plan from the beginning.”

Next, he hopes to develop the southside patio. This third phase will include fire pits, a drink rail, fire lamps and other accoutrements to add to the outdoor ambiance. The patio will be integrated into the trail and developed as the city’s plan progresses, which is expected to happen this year.

SunRift Restaurant is located next to the brewery, at 55 First Ave. WN in Kalispell. The restaurant is currently open for takeout orders every day from 12 to 8 p.m. by calling 406-314-6355.

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