



IT'S MILLER'S TIME ... WITH NATIONAL PREMIUM BEER by Teddy Durgin

Tim Miller has gone from being a successful oilman to the owner of National Premium Beer. But he doesn't really see it as that big of a leap. During a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, he remarked, "I tell people, 'It's the same thing! We're using the same kind of practices we used in the oil business, and I'm still delivering liquid. It's just in a can or a bottle and not in a truck!'"

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Miller was indeed the third generation to head his family's oil business, joining right after college and running it until 2001. Working at his grandfather's company over the years, he developed an appreciation for vintage advertising, signage, and fuel pumps. After Miller sold the company, he became a Realtor with Benson & Mangold in Easton, Md. But his interest in antiques and old signs persisted. One day in 2002, he saw some vintage beer signs in an antique store and thought, "Wouldn't it be cool to bring back an old beer brand?"

But it wasn't until eight years later, when a *Wall Street Journal* ad touted an old brand auction in New York City, that he decided to climb that particular mountain.

One of several beer brands up for bid was National Premium, an old Maryland beer originally marketed as the upscale version of National Bohemian (i.e., "Natty Bo").

What he purchased that day were basically the words "National Premium Beer." He would soon add the trademark, then the original formula with help from brewer Ray Klimovitz.

Miller then connected with Fordham & Dominion Brewing Company in Dover, Del. After speaking with CEO Jim Lutz, he contracted with the company as his brewery, Jack Ehmann as his brewmaster, and together they relaunched National Premium Beer just prior to Memorial Day in 2012.

Nearly seven years later, Miller is in the





early stages of self distributing. "We've been doing self distribution now for about two months," he confirmed, during our chat in mid-January, "and we've really been connecting with our customers, the stores, the restaurants. We still have distributors in some parts of the state, and we're very, very happy with them. And, sure, I could always go out and talk to a store operator or owner all I wanted. But I couldn't really sell them anything. I'd just hope that everything went through after I left, which it usually did. But it's just nice to have direct sales feedback from what you're doing."

Along the way, the former oilman has come to learn a lot about the beverage some call "suds," others call "brewskie," and still others call a "cold one." He remarked, "People love beer! They love talking about it. They love drinking it. They love hearing stories about it. I've found they want to know everything they can about National Premium. The questions and stories keep coming, too. I'll get, 'Oh, my grandfather was a pipe fitter at the original brewery.' There's always some kind of connection."

He remembers being immediately attracted to the colors of the National Premium label, specifically purple for the Baltimore Ravens and orange for the Orioles. "There's a lot of heritage with that crest and the classic look of it," he said. "And there is the nostalgia factor. We have the classic beer taste (Pilsener) that might remind you of a



beer you stole a sip from your dad or your grandfather. It's crisp, clean, and satisfying."

Over the years, he has expanded his company with the addition of the old "Wild Goose Brewery" assets and subsequently re-released Wild Goose Snow Goose and Wild Goose IPA. But it's his re-launch of National Premium that continues to garner the most attention.

He stated, "At its peak, the Wild Goose brands were in 13 states, and National Premium was a global brand. I think it was everywhere except the Middle East. We've been out for seven years in May. We've done Delaware and some other areas, but for now we're focused on Maryland."

Looking ahead, in addition to stepping up self-distribution, Miller is eagerly anticipating the new canned version of National Premium beer becoming available. He concluded, "The brewery in Dover that makes National Premium just got a canning line. They've done a couple runs of it. So, maybe by mid- to late April, it'll all be ready. We're really excited about getting cans. Pools, boats, golf carts ~ National Premium will become even more of a warm weather, summertime kind of beer."

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