

Pecan Liqueur Vies with Bourbon-Country Spirits

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The producer of a new high-end pecan liqueur hopes to carve out a niche in Kentucky's bourbon country, adding to the lineup of craft spirits-makers giving new twists and tastes to the state's burgeoning liquor business.

Rivulet Artisan Pecan Liqueur started reaching store shelves in Kentucky this month, tapping into the area's spirits expertise to emerge from concept to product in about a year. The small-batch liqueur is part of a wave of new spirits ventures in Louisville.

Rivulet is the brainchild of James B. Marshall, 63, a retired corporate executive who returned to his hometown to launch the business.

"You should do something that you have a passion for, and this is something I have a passion for," he said Wednesday at an event recognizing the brand. "I've had the opportunity to taste some of the worst spirits in the world and some of the best. My personal enjoyment ... would be my pedigree."

The liqueur is made from brandy aged in bourbon barrels and blended through a secret recipe — stored in a Louisville bank vault — for its pecan flavor.

Marshall said he is targeting Southeastern states and Texas for early expansion, starting with Tennessee and Georgia this summer. After that, the brand will spread based on demand, he said. The suggested retail price is \$34.99 per bottle.

Rivulet has already made an impression with spirits connoisseurs who got an early taste. The product notched awards at spirits competitions in New York, Los Angeles, Denver, Berlin, Hong Kong and London, Marshall said. It won Double-Gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

Rivulet's office is along "Whiskey Row" in Louisville, but the venture doesn't yet include its own distillery or warehouses.

"We're going to market first and then build the facility," Marshall said.

The plan is to eventually build a distillery in Louisville, Marshall said, but he didn't reveal a timetable. He declined to disclose how much he invested in the venture or how many employees he has.

Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer said the introduction of Rivulet adds to the city's momentum in attracting spirits producers. The goal is to market Kentucky's largest city as a spirits and culinary hub that will attract more visitors.

Heaven Hill Distilleries Inc. made a splash last year by opening a downtown

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Louisville attraction called The Evan Williams Bourbon Experience. It features a small distillery and offers tours and tasting rooms. Other spirits-makers plan new distilleries that will be open to visitors.

"For the first time, it's introducing a 52-week-a-year tourism-type of experience to our city that we haven't had before," the mayor said. "We're used to tourists coming in big chunks around (Kentucky) Derby time. So it's developing a whole new industry and a whole new vie to our city."

Powerhouse bourbon brands such as Jim Beam, Wild Turkey and Maker's Mark are crafted in rural Kentucky settings, an hour or less away from Louisville. Spirits giant Brown-Forman Corp. is based in Louisville, and Heaven Hill has a large distillery in the city.

Now, smaller players are choosing urban settings for their ventures.

The owners of Copper & Kings American Brandy Co. plan to show off their new Louisville distillery later this week.

Joe and Leslie Heron have been producing brandy for several months at the distillery while completing construction on the facility. It also includes a maturation cellar, art gallery event space, office suite and tasting room.

"We field numerous inquiries daily about when we'll be open for touring and tasting, so we decided to just do it," Joe Heron said.

The final phase of construction will be completed later this summer. Copper & Kings brandy products are already available in Kentucky.

Louisville's spirits expansion also includes ventures by Michter's Distillery LLC, Kentucky Peerless Distilling and the makers of Angel's Envy whiskeys.

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