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## From 'Random Thought' to Reality, Ruby Valley Brew Thrives in Sheridan



Ruby Valley Brew is where love of beer and community intersect.

After relocating from Ohio to the Ruby Valley, Amanda LaYacona and her husband drove through the small community of Sheridan, Montana, in search of a home to buy. Unexpectedly, she found herself interested in a commercial property too—a quaint building on Main Street.

LaYacona remembers the moment well: "I pointed to my husband, and I said, 'Look at that beautiful building. A brewery needs to go in there.' It was pretty much a random thought at the time. Lo and behold, this building ends up becoming available six months later."

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The couple settled into the community, where their new friends and neighbors confirmed LaYacona's instinct: Sheridan needed a brewery, and she wanted to deliver it.

"We formed a love for this valley and wanted to do something to better our town and hopefully give people a reason to stop here in Sheridan and see how great the people truly are here," she said.



LaYacona recognized that despite her entrepreneurial spirit, she wouldn't get far without someone to do the actual brewing. So, she cast a wide net and ultimately hired Zack Shaw, a master brewer with a wealth of experience from previously owning and operating a different brewery.

"At the time, I really knew nothing about the beer industry other than my own research and what I've read, which only goes so far," she said. "I needed to rely on someone's experience within the industry, and Zack came into play for that. He was a real integral part of this."

Small-town Montana would be quite a change for Shaw, originally from California and more recently from Washington. But he fit the bill, both for the job and for the same Big Sky lifestyle that attracted LaYacona.



"There is a sense of freedom here," she said. "I can take off and go up any drainage here and go on a hike, go hunt, go fish, and just completely remove myself from day to day stresses. It's a wonderful place to live. It really is."

Ruby Valley Brew would open in 2017 as a small operation for a small town. Although LaYacona and Shaw form its core, the brewery also employs servers who sometimes work as little as one night per week after finishing their day job, simply because it's fun.

Today, the brewery is a social hub for the community. It's a full house for Wednesday's trivia night, and the brewing tanks have name tags corresponding to the locals who frequent the establishment.



"I find breweries at this time are becoming a social gathering place, whether it's a small town, a big town...it's kind of becoming the pub on the corner of every little city for folks and communities to gather at," she said. "That social aspect is really huge."

That said, it isn't only the locals who stop by to try the rotating selection of beers. Ruby Valley Brew hosts plenty of guests from elsewhere across the state and also taps into the 12.5 million travelers who spend \$667 million at restaurants and bars while visiting Montana each year.

Following national trends, new breweries continue to pop up in Montana, and the state boasts one of the highest per-capita concentrations of them anywhere in the United States.

Yet demand for craft beer hasn't slowed down. In fact, LaYacona's plans for 2019 include expanding her operation and sourcing more of her ingredients from Montana.

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LaYacona said she doesn't see other breweries as competition but rather as allies, citing the popularity of [brewery trails](#) in which travelers experience the hospitality and beer of multiple communities in a single trip.

"The more the better," she said. "The more there are, the more that there is to taste and the more places for people to go visit."

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