

Beating out the Rest

John P. O'Sullivan celebrates 35 years and a history of strategic growth.

By Jennifer Cirillo

For beer distributors in Michigan, the past few years have not been easy. The state has suffered from the economic downturn, losing industrial business and experiencing high unemployment rates. However, John P. O'Sullivan Distributing, Inc., a MillerCoors distributor based in Flint, has managed to navigate through the uneasy waters and took strategic steps to ensure the longevity of its business.

Celebrating its 35th anniversary this month, the family-owner distributor has made quite a few acquisitions over the years—the latest, and the largest to date, being Saginaw-based Muehlenbeck Distributing in September, which doubled its case volume, grew its management team by bringing the employee count to 80, and added four additional counties to its territory. The large acquisition has been “smooth,” says Sean Butler, vice president—operations. His wife, Joanie O'Sullivan-Butler, is vice president and daughter of John P. O'Sullivan, president and CEO.

Gaining an additional million cases—the company now handles 2.5 million cases—presents its own challenges, but Butler says that when servicing a territory that spans from farmland to city life, “having a lot of different brands has helped.” Its portfolio of craft beers, notably local crafts beers from companies including Michigan Brewing Co. (which also co-packs for Kid Rock's beer) as well as Dragonmead Microbrewery, based in Warren, has helped drive sales.

To accommodate a growing portfolio of beers, the company has tripled the size of its draft cooler and has added case and pallet racking in its warehouse for space optimization. Butler says that a warehouse expansion also is being considered.

Aside from sheer growth, John P. O'Sullivan's key to success is simply its family attitude, which has resulted in long term, loyal employees. “When my dad started here in Flint in '76 there were six beer distributors in the area that were servicing locally and we are the last one left,” says O'Sullivan-Butler. A clear testament to the quality service, brands and overall performance the company has to offer. **BW**



« AT THE FOREFRONT of this family operation is, (l to r) Sean Butler, vice president—operations; Joanie O'Sullivan-Butler, vice president; John P. O'Sullivan, president and CEO and Greg Dowis, vice president—sales.

Celebrating 35 years and growing.
Opportunity at every step.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch proudly congratulates John P. O'Sullivan Distributing, Inc. on its 35th Anniversary. We salute your significant accomplishments and ongoing commitment to raising the bar.

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