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Beer and wine distributor Anderson keeps growing more than 50 years later

BY BRAD FLORY | JACKSON CITIZEN PATRIOT

Anderson Distributing began with three broken-down trucks and the exclusive right to sell Goebel beer to Jackson taverns and stores.

Goebel has died and gone to beer heaven, but 51 years after its founding, Anderson Distributing is still growing.

Today the company carries 2,200 products, serves 700 retailer customers, employs 45 workers, and has 30 vehicles and 50,000 square feet of warehouse space off Porter Street.

"It's basically just like any other business," said President Stephen Anderson, who founded the company with his father, Barney, and brother, Jim.

"Instead of selling cars or widgets, we sell beer and wine."

Two years ago, Anderson Distributing branched out into a whole new business field as an importer of wines from France and Argentina.

The Peerless Wine Selections division, headed by Richard Collett, doubled sales this year and is looking to break into new markets in three states.

"You cannot wait for business to come to you," Collett said. "You have to go out and get it."

Anderson Distributing covers all or part of six counties as exclusive wholesaler of its products. It delivers upward of 3,500 cases of beer and wine every day and is a broker of distilled spirits.

From modest beginnings, the company grew by acquiring rights to more brands and by purchasing three other beer distributors.

Even with a recession, Anderson Distributing recorded single-digit sales growth in the past year, Anderson said.



*Citizen Patriot • J. Scott Park
Workers load beer as they work their way around the warehouse at Anderson Distributing, preparing orders to be delivered the following day. The distributor has been in business for 51 years and employs 45 people.*

"People are not drinking less," he said, "but they are maybe trying lower-priced brands."

Peerless Wines Selections began nine years ago as little more than a hobby for Collett and some friends in the Jackson Wine Club.

"We intended to import wine for people in our wine club," said Collett, who retired from Northwest Schools after 25 years as a science teacher.

"We knew there were some really good wines (in Europe), and the prices were good. And we knew we weren't seeing them here."

Peerless quickly grew to cover Jackson County and other areas of southern Michigan. It worked with wholesalers, including Anderson.

"Two years ago, it came to the point where we either had to expand and put a lot money into the business, or blend in with another company," Collett said.

The "blending in" came when Anderson Distributing bought Peerless. Other founders left Peerless then, but Collett stayed on to run import operations.

Peerless wines, aided by the backing and connections of Anderson Distributing, quickly spread to new areas of the state and sales soared, Collett said.



*Citizen Patriot • J. Scott Park
Rick Collett, import director for Peerless Wine Selections, a division of Anderson Distributing, checks out new wine that arrived from*

In 2010, Peerless intends to expand into Missouri, Illinois and Wisconsin.

Collett's work requires traveling to Europe and South America to sample wines.

"Some people call it a dream job," he said. "The hardest part is finding quality producers at reasonable prices."

The dream job also includes headaches with government rules and security measures. Once a new product is discovered, it takes about a year to bring it to store shelves, he said.

Anderson and Collett both see high growth potential for the importing business.

"Michigan is just the tip of the iceberg as far as where things can go," Collett said.

Anderson Distributing Co.

Years in business: 51

Employees: 45

What the company does: Wholesale distributor of beer and wine and a broker of distilled spirits

Why it made this list: The company has expanded operations to become a wine importer with plans to expand into three states.