



Paddle Hard Brewing

IN DOWNTOWN
GRAYLING, THE
SWANDERS ATTRIBUTE
SUCCESS TO THEIR
COMMUNITY ROOTS

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

At Paddle Hard Brewing, we're both family and business partners.

We actually came into an existing operation a few years after its origination. Josie made a career change, and Jenny quit her job to start working for the former owners. Then around Thanksgiving of 2019, we took over running the bar.

We were pretty nervous when COVID hit, but the pandemic gave us a clear way to restart the business after we became owners and forced us to think outside the box in many ways. With labor shortages, we came up with new processes and equipment to serve more food with fewer people than ever before. Thankfully, we also have a great team and employees who have stayed with us.

Right now, even with a widespread labor shortage, we have 47 on our payroll. That's a huge testament to the fact that our employees like being here and working together. The team we've built and the camaraderie we have is something we can be proud of. Most Wednesdays, when we're closed, our staff all gets together to go canoeing or play softball. They have fun, but they also work hard for us. If we need to go out of town or something, they're pushing us out the door and saying, 'Go. We've got this covered.' We got pretty lucky.

Paddle Hard is a fixture in town, so we want to continue to make it great. Paddle Hard's community ties and the canoe race made it a good fit for us because our family has been involved with the canoe

marathon for over 40 years, whether volunteering, organizing, or paddling.

We never thought of starting a business anywhere other than Grayling. Does the future hold a second Paddle Hard somewhere else? Maybe. But we believe it's successful here because of this community.

We have roots here. Chad has been here almost 45 years. Jenny was born and raised here. The kids were born and raised here. We know our neighbors and the other small business owners. All of these other businesses that we're technically competing against are our friends and our neighbors—we collaborate more than we compete. You don't get that as much in a bigger city. It's a small-town community thing.

When Chad's mom retired from the state police, she came to work for us. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day last year, she and grandpa hand-rolled over 35,000 dough balls for our pizzas.

We're always trying to come up with something weird enough that people will try it and good enough that they'll order it again. For instance, we do a Reuben pizza for St. Patrick's Day, a Thanksgiving pizza with cranberry sauce on the side, and we have a Big Mac pizza. Our menu also has a 'Granny Gives Back' menu selection, so we have all these crazy pizzas, and a portion of the proceeds goes to the charity of granny's choice.

We were also lucky enough to get a Match on Main grant for our Paddle Hard Yard project, an auxiliary outdoor space—think casual, outdoor hangout and drinks. Eventually, we'll have food offerings there in the form of food trucks and takeout. It will be kind of a downtown backyard party with live music on Fridays and Saturdays. Some local fitness groups have told us they want to have classes there, and we'll host private events. We want to make it a community space.

—Chad & Jenny Swander, and Josie Swander-Krupp, Co-Owners of Paddle Hard Brewing

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