

AT THE BAR WITH BOWDITCH

A Legal Blog for the Craft Brewing Community

Exhibit ‘A’ Brewing Co. Taproom Team Learns ASL to Better Serve the Deaf Community in Framingham

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Exhibit ‘A’ Brewing Company is located in Framingham, Mass., which also happens to be the home of The Learning Center For The Deaf.

A year after opening their brewery, they began to notice a trend of several deaf people coming into their taproom on a regular basis. Since no one on their staff was fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), there was some initial difficulty communicating.

“We’d use a lot of gestures, body language, and pass notes to ensure that we were getting the beer they wanted, but beyond placing their order we couldn’t really communicate,” says Kelsey Roth, General Manager at Exhibit ‘A’ Brewing Co. “This felt empty to many of us behind the bar and certainly not up to the level of service we want to show to all of our customers.”

When Eric, the brewery’s assistant taproom manager, requested to take ASL classes so he could better communicate with this group of regulars, the brewery saw it as an opportunity to train all staff instead and make it a company-wide education.

They brought in an instructor who led a class on ASL basics focused around bar service. The group was taught how to sign their names, basic numbers for pricing, how to sign critical words and phrases like *can I help you?* and *would you like a beer?* They also were given some insight into deaf culture.

The overall goal for the team was to make their deaf customers feel more welcome and at home, even if they fumble their signs on occasion. Since then they’ve seen a steady stream of deaf customers. Their regulars often come in with new friends and faces.

“That signals to us that the word is getting out that Exhibit ‘A’ Brewing is a welcome place for the deaf,” says Roth. “Or

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maybe they say — *hey want to get a good laugh*? *Come watch these bartenders try to use ASL*— either way, we don't care as long as they feel welcome and comfortable in our taproom."

Exhibit 'A' Brewing Co. is located at 81 Morton St, Framingham, Mass. To learn more about the brewery, visit exhibit-a-brewing.com.

This story is the first in a series of inclusion success stories that are being collected and curated by the MBG's Diversity Committee with the goal to share best practices and inspire our member breweries to bring these ideas home to their small businesses. Have an inclusion success story from your brewery or business that you'd like to share? We want to hear it! Reach out to MBG Executive Director Katie Stinchon at katie@massbrewersguild.org for more information.

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