

Kinkaid Brewing Takes Ice to the Next Level

Microbrewery benefits from a next-generation ice machine.



The perfect drink needs
the perfect ice.

Cody Schmick's goal is to create taproom destinations in major

Nebraska towns. He is well on his way with his Kinkaidler Brewing Company operation.

"We have several microbrewery locations, and when we go into a new space, we don't want to copy and paste," Schmick says. "My team and I look at the neighborhood and the surroundings [before deciding on the layout and design]."

Currently, every Kinkaidler Brewing location was built on a pre-existing site, with the exception of a new German beer hall concept that is currently in the works. In fact, choosing atypical spaces has been the goal.

Schmick established his first microbrewery location back in 2014 at a former pumpkin patch on a 4-acre farm in Broken Bow. This site, situated in north-central Nebraska's Sand Hills, features a full-service restaurant, bar and outdoor space. In 2017, the Grand Island Kinkaidler's location opened in a 100-year-old former theater that was converted into a bar. It also includes a full-service restaurant, along with a microbrewery.

A year later, Schmick opened another microbrewery, this time in Lincoln's upscale Haymarket area in what was formerly a train station. "This is a trendy, downtown spot with concerts and other events happening nearby, so it's in a very high-traffic area," Schmick says.

"It's strictly a taproom with no restaurant, but we have food trucks and hold events like brunch on the train platform."

Schmick also owns a distillery in Lincoln, Side Show Spirits, the first distillery in the city, he notes, and one of only a few in the state of Nebraska. Opened in 2020, Side Show Spirits is cocktail-driven and bartender-inspired. The distillery's spirits are part of the menu at all Kinkaidler locations and distributed to supermarkets and liquor stores within the state. These include peach whiskey, white whiskey, jalapeño vodka, Nebraska corn vodka, barrel-aged vodka and apple brandy.

It was last year that Kinkaidler's Omaha microbrewery opened its doors and quickly became one of the top five breweries by volume in the state, according to Schmick. Serving as a community bar for 10 years prior to Kinkaidler moving in, this location offers cocktails, craft beers and ciders, but no food.

"We have brand continuity from Kinkaidler, which has built a strong name being synonymous with beer and cocktails," Schmick says. "We wanted to make the Omaha space not just beer- but cocktail-focused. So, we built that program from the ground up alongside our distillery."

This 3,000-square-foot microbrewery seats 100 inside and 60 on the patio. When customers first walk in, they see a red phone on the wall. "It's used to call my partner and our head brewer, Dan 'The Wisen' Hodges, the company's original brewmaster," Schmick explains. "He doesn't leave the Broken

Bow location, so the phone dials him directly." Customers can use the phone to leave a message for Hodges and sometimes he even picks up and talks to them directly about Kinkaidler Brewing.

The Omaha site has two separate and distinct spaces — the microbrewery portion sits in the front and features a 15-foot-long bar, and the Side Show Lounge, which has a more upscale vibe and features a cocktail bar, is in back. The latter space is set off by drapes and a green color palette. There also is a retail component located to the left of the entrance, where customers can purchase Kinkaidler's T-shirts, hats, glassware, flannels and other merch.

"All of our locations have a robust cocktail list, as we want to make sure those who don't drink beer can choose something else."

Cody Schmick



A pleasant summer evening at Kinkaidler Brewing Co.

“All of our locations have a robust cocktail list, as we want to make sure those who don’t drink beer can choose something else. We offer bourbon, whiskey and high-end cocktails,” Schmick says. “Whether it’s a cocktail over ice or a bartender-created cocktail that’s stirred or shaken, ice plays a big role in our concept.”

Executive Bartender Benton Alexander builds the cocktails to reflect trends and the different neighborhoods’ demographics. “Although we started as a beer bar, we’ve been introducing a major cocktail element to all sites,” Alexander explains. “Our program showcases Side Show Spirits’ whiskeys, brandies and vodkas.” He echoes Schmick’s feelings that ice plays an important role in the guest experience as it accounts for a third of what customers receive in their beverage presentation or preparation.

In addition to fresh cocktails, Kinkaider’s locations offer a wide selection of canned cocktails, such as Blue Mermaid Pineapple Lemonade, The Great Firebreather Spicy Grapefruit Cooler, The Green Dryad Cucumber Mint Cooler and The Witch Doctor Mai Tai. “We currently only distribute our canned spirits in Nebraska,” Schmick says. “We are taking care of home base first.”

The menu also includes flights of cocktails or straight spirits. “Much of it starts with our bar experience and what’s going on; this is where our cocktail ideas begin,” Alexander says. “Talking to guests and making fresh cocktails for our clientele is the R&D part. We look at how we can take recipes and utilize them in our distillery as a canned offering that we can take to market.”

All Kinkaider Brewing locations have been leasing Scotsman Prodigy Plus® ice machines. “We started our lease

program with Kinkaider’s three years ago,” says Ken Leiderbrand, owner of Omaha-based Midwest Distributing, a Scotsman equipment distributor.

When Scotsman was seeking locations to test its new, next-generation Prodigy Elite® line, Kinkaider Brewing appeared to be a perfect fit. “Midwest Distributing has a good relationship with Kinkaider’s, so we decided to put a unit in its Omaha facility to try it out and see how the features work,” says Jeff Biel, Scotsman’s Vice President of Marketing and Product Development. “Kinkaider’s was a good match as we were seeking current customers that we have good relationships with, who we have access to and who will give us honest feedback on the machine.”

It was a consensus that the microbrewery’s Omaha location was an ideal setting for the 500-pound-per-day unit. “We want to test new units in bars because beer yeast creates a solution that negatively impacts the machine,” Leiderbrand explains. “We want to see how the test unit holds up to minerals and what’s in the water. Kinkaider’s was targeted for its cocktail ice.”

The third-generation Prodigy Elite has a basic layout and design similar to its predecessor Prodigy Plus but with a refined user interface. It has added a bin light, a control board that provides better diagnostics for service agents and a preservation mode. “Sometimes ice machines get quirky errors or water hits a sensor and the machine automatically shuts down,” Biel says. “With this line’s preservation mode, the unit will continue operating while indicating there is a problem.” This eliminates nuisance shutdowns that can happen when anomalies occur. The machine knows there is not



The bar at Kinkaider Brewing’s Omaha location.

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Scotsman®

Machines installed worldwide:

1,000,000+

Tons of Scotsman flake ice and nugget ice cubes produced daily:

12,500

Scotsman ice cubes produced daily worldwide:

6 billion

Crystal-clear ice cubes introduced:

1950

The Original Chewable Ice introduced:

1981

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a safety issue and will continue producing ice.

A new app launched as part of the Prodigy Elite line allows users to interact with the machine more easily. “Instead of taking the machine’s panels off for a diagnosis, the app allows users to immediately see if the unit is operating properly,” Biel explains. “It has an intuitive cleaning guide, so the app walks users through the cleaning process.”

This feature allows service techs to clean the machine more quickly and efficiently, making it less costly to maintain. “On the app side, it’s easier to add functionality,” Biel says. “Right now, it’s a text-driven interface with basic graphics, but we’re looking to do more on the app side to integrate video clips and multimedia. This will help even more with cleaning, diagnostics and troubleshooting.”

In differentiating the ice machine, Scotsman has leveraged the user interface to provide basic information on the machine and details on its



Craft beer and cocktails are on the menu at Kinkaidler Brewing.



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Osmany Fernandez
Omaha location manager

The Scotsman Prodigy Elite ice machine helps Fernandez get through another busy evening.

operation. It will reveal whether the machine is working properly and, if not, when a service agent should be called.

“On the externals, if you don’t have the app, this machine is very simple; a green light is good and a red light means something is wrong and needs attention,” Biel says.

Osmany Fernandez, who manages Kinkaidler’s Omaha location, says there have been zero complaints with the unit. “It consistently provides clean ice quickly with no issues. Plus,

it provides a nice display and presentation aesthetically for cocktails,” he says. “We even had one of our guys from another location comment on how clean the ice was.”

Schmick seeks low-maintenance equipment with minimal problems for his breweries. “With multiple locations, I need something that can handle the volume and works when needed,” he says. “My job is to break down barriers for staff. The Prodigy Elite has been great a fit for our business.”