

## CHATTING

with  
**JOAN  
GOLDSTEIN**



Commissioner of Economic Development Joan Goldstein strives to keep the Vermont craft beverage industry thriving during and after COVID-19

It's been quite a year for many Vermonters. For an industry that relies on gatherings of people to succeed, the Vermont craft beverage industry has certainly taken a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vermont craft brewing industry is also a vital part of Vermont's vibrant economy and tourism. Joan Goldstein, Vermont's commissioner of economic development, understands the importance of preserving Vermont's craft brewing industry.

For the past six years, Goldstein has been leading a team of 20 state employees in efforts to develop and bolster Vermont's workforce. This past year, of course, was unlike any other year for Goldstein. While the scope of her workload changed, her commitment to supporting local brewers

and distillers did not. BrewView had a chance to connect with Goldstein. The interview below has been edited for clarity and space.

**BrewView:** Can you share how your work changed during the pandemic?

**Joan Goldstein:** My work has been completely changed from last March, when we had the unenviable task of closing businesses down. We worked hard to understand how federal programs could help Vermonters. We then had to advocate how to distribute 300 million [dollars]. We have been processing applications for funding and now advocating for those who were left out. And now with the American Rescue Plan in play, it's going to be a question of what else we need to

do for businesses that might still be struggling to re-open.

**BV:** How do you think the pandemic will change the Vermont brewing economy moving forward?

**JG:** I don't think we are going to be back to pre-pandemic levels of normal business activity, but hopefully things will slowly and carefully return to some sense of normalcy. We expect this crisis may have a lingering effect for at least a year in terms of places not being quite where they left off. I think the food and beverage industry will continue with curbside models and will continue to utilize creative delivery and takeout methods.

**BV:** What kinds of programs have you been able to offer to help brewers over these months since the start of the pandemic?

**JG:** More than 330 million [dollars] went to businesses in the form of assistance last year and about 50 percent of it went to the accommodation and food services industry, which includes brewers. Additionally, the Vermont Training Program annually provides funds to businesses and pays up to 50 percent of the wages for a staff member while they are being trained. This is a very handy tool, especially as breweries were looking to recruit or train brewers.

**BV:** Why is the craft brewing industry so important to Vermont's economy?

**JG:** In terms of tourism, it's brilliant! People come to Vermont just to visit breweries and to taste amazing beer! Many breweries also occupy spaces that were otherwise vacant, which



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brings vibrancy in a village center or in a downtown. The Alchemist started in Waterbury, which at the time wasn't such a thriving place. Now Waterbury has become this food and beer center, even though the Alchemist has since moved away. Local breweries and distilleries create jobs and help revitalize their local economy. We definitely appreciate and value their investment in Vermont. And their beer is amazing!

**BV:** What was your job like in pre-pandemic times?

**JG:** No two days were the same and I can hardly remember what it was like. But generally, I would visit businesses and discover how they are operating and what their hurdles are and then I would go about trying to help. It really is an outreach and a business relationship type role and a lot of my time is spent in the legislature advocating for policy improvements or initiatives in order to improve the state's prospects for prosperity now and for future generations to come.

**BV:** What are you most looking forward to once social distancing guidelines are relaxed?

**JG:** Being with friends and family and breaking bread and toasting together with great local beer!

## AGENCY OF COMMERCE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

One National Life Drive  
Deane C. Davis Building, 6th Floor  
Montpelier, VT  
[accd.vermont.gov/economic-development](http://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development)