





BEST *in* LOCAL SODAS

Yacht Club Bottling

Builds on a Century of Tradition

*Written by Daniel Lieberman
Photography by Scott Erb and Donna Dufault*

Now in its hundredth year, Yacht Club has been named the Official Soda of Rhode Island by the state legislature. Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimundo visited the company in their Centerdale, Rhode Island facility this year to recognize Yacht Club's centennial. The story began when the Sharpe family came to Rhode Island from England in 1915 and began producing Yacht Club sodas in the house next door to the current building, erected in 1923. A well on the property, dug in the 1920s, is the source of Yacht Club's water, which absorbs carbonation beautifully at room temperature without adding salt, making it ideal for high-quality sodas.

John Sgambato, grandfather of John and Michael, the current owners, came to work for the Sharpe family in 1935. He became a salesman and worked his way up to managing the company in the 1950s. John purchased Yacht Club from the Sharpe family in 1960, in partnership with his nineteen year-old son, Bill. Bill's sons grew up in the business, and John has been running it for about 10 years. He enjoys taking on new challenges, like bringing Yacht Club into the social media age and visiting farmers markets and festivals around Rhode Island to meet customers and test new products. He says, "We come to people instead of people coming to us." Above all John strives to maintain and improve Yacht Club's products. One way that plays out is a constant search for all-natural, high-quality ingredients and flavors.

The cocktail boom of the last decade or so led to the re-introduction of Yacht Club's Ginger Beer, which had been dropped from the line because it had nobody was buying it. All-natural Yacht Club Ginger Beer turns out to be perfect in newly-revived classics like the Moscow Mule, and the Dark and Stormy. Natural grapefruit and lemon sodas have also found favor as mixers, and John says that "Yacht Club Crème Soda goes great with bourbon."

John mixes the flavors for all of the company's products. Yacht Club sources most of its flavors from three steady suppliers, but John tastes samples from other flavor houses regularly to see if something new and different might make a great product or improve on a current offering. John says he's "fooling around" with three or four formulas for future products right now (November 2015), and there'll be at least one new flavor in the spring and one in the summer of 2016. Yacht Club may join the industry trend of producing seasonal and limited release flavors, too.

When John starts working on something new, he'll make up a batch and run it by the family. If they like it, he'll tinker with it until he considers it perfect. Next he takes the new soda on the road and tries it out with bartenders and chefs. The farmers markets and festivals that Yacht Club attends are perfect places to audition new products as well. John says it takes eight months to a year to bring a new flavor of Yacht Club soda to market. For instance, he tweaked the citric acid level in the Ginger Beer over and over again for the better part of a year before he was finally happy with the formula and brought it out in 2011.



What else is on the horizon for Yacht Club? They're installing new bottling equipment with an eye to expanding production and rebuilding a vintage 1948 bottle-washing machine that is "basically irreplaceable." High-quality glass bottles, with distinctive labels featuring Rhode Island symbols and historical references, come from an Owens-Illinois factory in Canada, which ensures a steady supply for Yacht Club as it continues to grow and develop new products for its second century.

The Yacht Club Bottling Works Factory Store is open Monday-Tuesday 8:00am-5:00pm, Wednesday-Friday 8:00am-6:00pm, and Saturday 8:00am-3:00pm. Call them at 401-231-9290 or email info@yachtclubsoda.com. **F**



John, Bill and Michael Sgambato



