

Born in the Carolinas AND RAISED IN A GLASS

100 YEARS OF CHEER
FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S
FAVORITE SOFT DRINK

TEXT BY HEIDI BILLOTTO

Time to raise our glasses to toast the spirit of locally produced product this season as The Carolina Beverage Corporation, makers of the iconic soft drink, Cheerwine, originally conceived by general store owner L.D. Peeler of Salisbury, NC. in 1917, celebrates 100 years in the making.

Back in the day Peeler's new and unique soft drink with the sweet cherry taste took the burgeoning cola industry by storm. Fast forward 100 years later – while there have been some seasonal variations on the theme, that same recipe is still pleasing the public's palate as the delicious Cheerwine beverage we know and love today.

The very building in which Cheerwine was invented still stands in Salisbury at 322 East Council Street. Although it is no longer a general store, the murals on the side of the building tell the story of its heritage. The company's headquarters are a mile or two away, but still proudly in their hometown at 1413 Jake Alexander Blvd. S., Salisbury, NC 28146.

"While much has changed around Cheerwine over the last hundred years, the taste and authenticity of Cheerwine itself will never change," promises Cliff Ritchie, Cheerwine's president. Ritchie is the great-grandson of the soft drink's founder, L.D. Peeler. His children, Joy Harper and Carl Ritchie, are the family's fifth generation and currently work for the Salisbury-based company which continues to be family-owned.

The company and its many fans have been celebrating this major milestone since the first of the year, when the Rowan County Museum, located at 202 N. Main St., Salisbury, NC 28144, turned over more than half of the exhibit space to display a wonderful and impressive collection – much of it on loan from private collectors of Cheerwine memorabilia, advertising, bottles, cans and packaging.

In the largest exhibit room the museum has set up an old fashioned soda shop – for display only – with counter stools from the original Salisbury Woolworth's and a 1950s circa original vinyl covered booth as well. It's a step back in time through the ten



decades of Cheerwine's long lived popularity. So much to look at, so much many will remember – from billboards to old newspaper advertisements.

Several of the original glass bottles, some still with the paper Cheerwine label intact, are on display at the Rowan County Museum in Salisbury, now until the end of the year.

"Some are from private collections and others we found carefully wrapped in my grandfather's attic," Joy Ritchie Harper, now the marketing director for the still family-owned brand, told me.

As was the case with the inception of many of the early soft drinks, Peeler was looking for a way to improve the taste of seltzer water. 100 years ago was still a time before glass soda bottles, which would crack under the pressure of the effervescent, and decades before the concept of canned sodas or plastic bottles.

The seltzer water was a chemical concoction, and until production of the bubbled water was fine-tuned, it took the expertise of someone with a scientific background to get the mix just right. And



so it was that most early soft drinks, often called tonics or elixirs, were thought to give a healthy boost and were prepared and mixed for on-site consumption by pharmacists.

By the early 1920s, glass bottle production improved, and so the first bottled sodas came around. The first vending machines came in the 1950s and gave the consumer the convenience of buying a single Cheerwine on location. Prior to that Cheerwine was delivered to stores, first by horse and buggy, and then by delivery trucks.

THE SECRET IS IN THE SYRUP

As the mix was perfected, and the seltzer water became available on tap, soft drink service moved from pharmacies to soda shops where "soda jerks" blended the sweet Cherry flavored syrup with just the right amount of seltzer water.

Cheerwine, and other soft drinks of the day, was not only served by the glass over ice, but the syrup was served on ice cream sundaes and in ice cream floats. Each of these soda shop's specials was hand crafted by a Soda Jerk. These were the craft mixologists of their day. The moniker was coined and became popular in the vernacular, as a result of the jerking action it took to pull down the tap to pour the seltzer in the glass. Even though soft drinks like Cheerwine had been sold to consumers in bottles as the industry developed since the 1920s; these popular soda shops and then the drive-ins with "car hops" that followed, continued to mix their own, blending soft drink syrups and seltzer together to order.

The syrup originally came to soda shops and restaurants in gallon boxes shaped like oversized paper milk cartons that were labeled "For Fountain Use" only. But over the years, Cheerwine syrup has

found its way into our kitchens where chefs and home cooks alike opted to think outside the syrup box, and have loved blending this wonderfully sweet elixir into hundreds of different recipes.

Interestingly, the syrup is not thick and honestly not overly sweet. It definitely tastes of cherries and is indeed, as the brand's slogan has always promised, "deliciously different", making it a beverage that does double time working beautifully as a culinary ingredient, as well.

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Cliff Ritchie, Cheerwine's president.

The delicious secret I am here to share with you today is that Cheerwine syrup is readily available to consumers at an incredible price. It is yours for the asking, ready for you to purchase to use in your own craft cocktails, cakes, ice cream concoctions, candies, and in marinades, barbecue sauces and glazes for beef, pork, chicken, duck, shrimp and other seafoods as well.

DAYTRIPPIN'

Cheerwine's syrup is available at the Cheerwine corporate headquarters in Salisbury anytime during regular business hours for just \$3 a bottle – reason enough for the 45 minute road trip to Salisbury, NC.

While you are in town, take some time to look around a bit – there is lots to see. Know that the exhibit at the Rowan County Museum will be up from now till the end of the year and makes for the start of a wonderful day trip from Charlotte to

Salisbury (call the museum for hours of operation).

Located at almost the exact halfway mark between Charlotte and Greensboro, Salisbury is the county seat of Rowan county and also home to New Sarum Brewery, a craft brewery and tap house located in the center of downtown. On weekends there are tours of local antebellum homes such as the Hall House; and the North Carolina Transportation Museum is just a short drive away in Spencer, North Carolina. Before you leave Salisbury's historic downtown area, though, be sure to stop in at Innes Drug Store for a Cheerwine ice cream soda or if you are craving a fabulous grilled hot dog accompanied by a Cheerwine in a glass bottle, stop in at Hap's Grill just a few doors up on Main Street.

CHEERWINE'S \$100 CENTENNIAL CAN PROMOTION

Once you get home there are still some 500 reasons to keep celebrating Cheerwine's anniversary on through the end of the year. As you purchase cans of Cheerwine this year, keep your eyes out for the \$100 Centennial Can promotion. There are 500 of the specially labeled cans to be distributed throughout the Cheerwine inventory this year. Find one, peel off the winning label on the back of the can and win \$100!

Here is how it works. Throughout 2017, the beloved soft drink will continue rolling out new editions in its centennial can series with each of the Cheerwine labels used over the course of the past ten decades. Cheerwine fans are invited to collect all seven cans in the series.

My Cheerwine sources report that there are still plenty of cans out there yet to be redeemed, so there is still the chance to win! Check out the complete contest details at Cheerwine.com

Then, be sure to join the fan club so that you, too, can become a member of the soft drink's own club, The Cheerwine Authentic Soda Society, and enjoy all the deliciously fun privileges of membership. For details visit www.cheerwine.com/fanquiz/.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Where to buy: Cheerwine is available in supermarkets, restaurants, mass merchandisers and convenience stores in select states nationwide, across the state of North Carolina and on the company's website at cheerwine.com.

In addition to the yearlong Cheerwine exhibits open all of 2017, the Rowan Museum in downtown Salisbury also has Cheerwine shirts for sale. Visit www.rowanmuseum.org for more information and museum hours. ■