

More than 2,000 expected for Stone Brewing event

By Sarah Kleiner Varble
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NORFOLK

Dear founders of Stone Brewing Co.,

The people of Norfolk plan to show you the love.

More than 2,000 revelers, some donning gargoyle masks mimicking your logo, are expected to swarm downtown tonight for a "tap takeover" at the city's monthly First Fridays event on Granby Street.

Your aromatic, hop-forward, West Coast suds will be the only brews flowing from taps (which, we admit, will be a pleasant departure from past offerings that have been somewhat... limited).

Yes, this is the first public rally to lure your planned eastern U.S. brewery to Norfolk instead of Richmond and Columbus, Ohio, your other top choices for the \$30 million investment and the 350 jobs that could come with it.

Those other guys have caught your attention out in Escondido, Calif., with their own shenanigans, including a 72-bar rally in Columbus in early August. You graciously acknowledged their support on the "Stone2Cbus" Facebook page, which had 2,261 "likes" as of Happy Hour on Thursday.

But facts are facts, and Facebook doesn't lie. The "Bring Stone Brewing Co. to Norfolk" page had 4,331 "likes."

Richmond's version had 2,895 - presumably not including residents who, according to local media reports, have questioned how a nearby brewery would affect the low-income, historic Fulton neighborhood, one of two sites you may be considering.

You've heard that Stone2Cbus is flying two contest winners to visit your brewery - and possibly meet with you - in Escondido? Grassroots support hasn't gone that far in Norfolk. Does it matter?

Your spokeswoman, the tight-lipped but amiable Sabrina LoPiccolo, wasn't sure whether groundswells of public support would make much of a difference in your decision (which has yet to be made but will be announced in four to six weeks). "Site requirements," including, ahem, water quality, will trump everything, she said.

Either way, the Downtown Norfolk Council was already planning to host First Fridays in September, said its president, Mary Miller. So adding a few Stone-themed touches and ordering a truckload of Stone-brewed beer was a no-brainer.

"I think they are interested in a place where they're going to be welcomed to the community," she said. "If this shows them there would be a connection to the community, we have nothing to lose, so why not do it?"

The council doesn't have plans for another rally, but if past media exposure to your game of elimination is an indicator, you'll hear about it.

Until then, "Cheers!"

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