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## **Old mills, new uses: The craft brewing and distilling industry - by Donald Grebien**

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Mayor of Pawtucket

In 1792, with the success of Slater Mill using river power to weave textiles, the City of Pawtucket became home to hundreds of mills manufacturing lace, non-woven and elastic woven materials, jewelry, silverware, metals and textiles. But the Great Depression forced many manufacturers to close their doors, driving these facilities south, and later to other countries, where operations and labor were cheaper.

Over 20 years ago, many of Pawtucket's mills were underutilized or vacant. After the Rhode Island General Assembly created the city's 307-acre Arts District, artists, creative-sector companies and small businesses began coming to live and work in these mills.

Now Pawtucket is seeing the rapid growth and expansion of one particular industry – the craft brewing and distilling industry. This growing sector has positively impacted the city's economy by creating new jobs and bringing vitality to the city's mills. Today, Pawtucket has four craft beer breweries and two craft spirit distilleries, and the city is considered to be the unofficial craft capital of Rhode Island.

Why is Pawtucket the perfect home for craft breweries and distilleries?

Pawtucket has excellent water quality thanks to the building of a \$60 million state-of-the-art water treatment facility that became operational in March 2008. Over the years millions of dollars have been spent on the replacing and relining of 260 miles of pipes. With great drinking water, we ensure that our craft industries can produce some of the best quality craft beer and spirits in not only Rhode Island but also throughout New England and beyond. And, yes, our historic mill buildings give these manufacturers plenty of space to make and serve their products to eager patrons.

Over two months ago these breweries and distilleries banded together to host the first ever "Pawtucket Craft Crawl." This week-long event attracted hundreds of people to visit these mills and try a unique drink special offered only for that week. An estimated 300 people completed the Craft Crawl, driving up the bottom line of these small businesses. We hear that business increased by

70% at one brewery and 130% at one of the distilleries. The participating manufacturers cumulatively generated at least \$10,000 in additional business and brought new visitors to the city's mills.

Events like the Craft Crawl are helping to spread the word throughout Rhode Island about the craft beer and spirits scene and thriving artist community. Come to Pawtucket and have a brew or two, or visit our artist studios.

Join the evolution. For details about leasing or purchasing one of Pawtucket's mills, contact commerce director Jeanne Boyle at [jboyle@pawtucketri.com](mailto:jboyle@pawtucketri.com).

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