



ED DEWITT Review Staff

Above, Steve Settimi explains the barrel aging process of his spirits. Below left to right, the barrels, Steve explains the fermentation process and the 25-gallon still.

Hampshire's 1st distillery set to open at Flying Squirrel Ranch

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PURGITSVILLE — Steve Settimi owns and operates the largest, oldest distillery in the oldest county in West Virginia.

Sounds impressive, right? What if I told you that distillery was right here in Hampshire County?

It's widely known that Hampshire is the oldest of West Virginia's 55 counties. In 262 years of growth here there have been countless businesses come and go as the generations progress.

In all that time — as far as we know — there has never been a *licensed* distillery put down roots here. Settimi's Flying Squirrel Ranch and Farm in Purgitsville bucks that trend.

"It's a pretty neat fact," Settimi said. Now that the licensing — a process that took about a year — is complete, he's nearly ready to roll.

Settimi relocated to Hampshire County to escape the hustle and bustle of the Washington, D.C., lifestyle that he lived for the last several years while working in international development.

He chose the spot off Rada Road to call his home and begin his latest venture for a pair of reasons.

"It was far enough from the city that I could get the land pretty cheap, but it was close enough to the airport. I didn't want to be any further away than this, and this is where I ended up," he said.

The name of his operation is a tribute to an unfortunate incident that happened as he was clearing dead trees from the land in preparation for development.

"We were cutting this big tree down and as it crashed to the ground a family of flying squirrels rushed out." The shock stayed with Settimi and now he vows to think twice before removing any other such trees.

He also paid tribute to the displaced squirrels in the name the place he makes his home and business.

At 1st glance, the operation appears both humble and impressive.

The layout of the land that Settimi calls "an eventual hub for agricultural tourism" includes the barn-like structure where the distilling process happens and the barrels rest to fine-tune the goodness they contain.



The structure is the perfect size for a craft distillery. One end of the building, barrels full of product in various stages of finishing are neatly nestled on racks. Not too far away sits the 25-gallon still where the magic happens.

A smaller adjacent structure doubles as a garage and Steve's living space. "I went from a 3000 square foot home to 450 square feet, so you can imagine the downsizing that I had to do," he said.

The property also boasts a zip-line and a pond for fishing. As his vision takes shape over the upcoming months camping will be offered as well.

When Settimi's distillery is officially open for business sometime in the next few weeks — he's waiting until the recently passed lower tax goes into effect — he will offer several different spirits all crafted from ingredients found right here in Hampshire County.

That includes corn for the whiskey, as well as different berries the local pine trees produce for his gins.

He has also planted grapes for brandy, peaches and hazelnut trees, and other crops he will one day use in future variations of his spirits.

"The water here is especially good," he said. It provides Settimi with the right chemical makeup to enhance the process of crafting the liquor.

The barn will one day double as a picturesque venue for weddings, parties and meetings, as Settimi hopes to break into the event business here as well.

It is a bold vision and a gamble opening such a unique business, especially the first of its kind here in Hampshire County, and Settimi understands that.

That's why he's gone all in and made the farm his home. "If things go south, I can always live off the land," he joked.

He likely won't have to worry about that, as his product is already in demand with his friends, family and associates around the country.

As for the impact on the local market?

Settimi has the ability to sell right from his distillery and will also be able to sell to area restaurants and bars directly.

With the growing farm-to-table mentality that seems to be booming now, he should not have a hard time finding regular customers here to take advantage of such a unique product to the area.

"I really like Hampshire County," Settimi said. "People have been

very supportive. When I go and buy my corn they ask when I'll be open, things like that," he said.

As far as when business officially gets off the ground, Settimi hopes to be able to sell bottles legally as of the printing of this story.

Soon, rum, gin, brandy and, down the line, bourbon and several other spirits will be available. The final products will be marketed under the name Rada Appalachian Spirits.

He will be hosting a big open house the weekend of June 20 where people can come and sample his spirits, as well as see the rest of what Flying Squirrel Farms and Ranch has to offer.

For more information and directions to Flying Squirrel, you can find the operation's page through a quick Facebook search, or check out Steve's website at www.flyingsquirrelranch.com. □

