



Source: *Heritage Distilling Company, Inc.*

August 03, 2023 08:31 ET

The Tonto Apache Tribe to Partner with Heritage Distilling Company to Develop Arizona's First Tribally Owned and Operated Distillery on Native Land

Heritage's Tribal Beverage Network to provide new revenue, destination amenities and employment opportunities, and advance economic sovereignty for the Apache Corners Initiative

PAYSON, Ariz. and GIG HARBOR, Wash., Aug. 03, 2023 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Heritage Distilling Company, Inc. ("HDC" or "Heritage"), a leading craft distiller of innovative premium brands, today announced a partnership with the Tonto Apache Tribe to develop a spirits distillery and tasting room adjacent to Mazatzal Hotel & Casino. The distillery will produce and serve both Heritage's portfolio of award-winning spirits, as well as exclusive Tonto Apache created brands, crafted to reflect tribal flavors and the local region.

Co-founded by Justin and Jennifer Stiefel in 2011, Heritage is, and has been, the most awarded craft distillery in North America by the American Distilling Institute for the past decade and is recognized for its innovative brand family of premium whiskeys, gins, vodkas, rums and ready-to-drink cocktails. Beyond their mastery of distilling and blending, the Co-founders saw both an injustice done to Native American indigenous communities and a mutually beneficial economic opportunity to create national distribution for Heritage's portfolio of award-winning, craft spirits. Together, they created the Tribal Beverage Network (TBN), a first-of-its kind partnership with Native American Tribes to develop Heritage-branded distilleries, brands, and tasting rooms to serve patrons of tribal casinos and entertainment venues.

"We have spent considerable time with the team from Heritage and we have toured their facilities in the Pacific Northwest. After seeing them help to change the federal law to make this a legal activity for Tribes across the U.S., we are excited to open a tribally-owned distillery in partnership with them harnessing their experience, expertise and top-level reputation in the craft spirits space," said Tribal Chairman Calvin Johnson. "We will be the first Heritage Distilling location in the southwest and we are excited to offer this new amenity to our current patrons and the next generation of patrons we know are coming to the Mazatzal Hotel & Casino and to our new Apache Corners development."

Heritage's industry-leading operations are derived from their two distilleries and five tasting rooms across Washington and Oregon, along with their brand location in partnership with the Chehalis Indian Tribe in Rochester, Washington, at its Talking Cedar facility. As a TBN partner, the Tonto Apache-owned and operated destination will also offer several amenities for patrons including a Tasting Room that features Heritage spirits like Cocoa Bomb Chocolate Whiskey, Heritage Canned Cocktails, Florescence Vodka (a partnership with celebrity Chef Danielle Kartes & Rustic Joyful Food), Stiefel's Select Single Barrel and Small Batch whiskeys, and Special Forces Whiskey, among others.

In addition to on-site tastings, the Tonto Apache distillery will also extend HDC's innovative membership programs available to TBN partners: The Cask Club®, an annual membership-based program that allows members to create and customize spirits of their choice; and The Spirits Club®, a program that provides members quarterly shipments of Heritage's award-winning spirits delivered directly to their door at a reduced rate, as well as priority access to new, limited, and seasonal releases.

“Spirits production and sales is the next major source of financial growth for tribes. With more than [524](#) tribal casinos in operation, along with their hotels, golf courses, arenas, resorts, and retail spaces that sell adult beverages, distilling and spirits production is the next logical extension of their development. For 184 years, tribes were shut out of the spirits industry by antiquated Andrew Jackson-era legislation. Now, they will be primed to join the industry as it enters a growth cycle,” said Justin Stiefel, Heritage Co-founder. “When fuel and cigarette taxes decline from those industries becoming less viable in the coming years, and the need to attract new patrons to casinos as consumers shift their habits away from beer and wine into spirits, the Tribal Beverage Network’s goal is to help tribes grow their local economies and allow them to offset those shifts.”

With captive consumer demand available at casinos, hotels, resorts, convenience-stores, golf courses and other entertainment venues that are located on tribal trust lands, TBN provides compelling economics for participating tribes. Members can benefit from wholesale and retail margins as well as tax capture. In addition, tribes entering this industry can generate funds to support social and economic initiatives; increase employment; diversify the skillsets of their members; and work with Heritage to create their own brands that celebrate the unique characteristics of a tribe or region.

Chairman Johnson noted, “Apache Corners is a multi-year community and economic planning effort by the Tonto Apache Tribal Nation. Evaluation began in 2020 focused on what economic opportunities existed that would benefit the Tonto Apache Nation’s economy and benefit the region. Approximately 75 acres on the reservation will be used to build the future Tonto Apache economy and we are thrilled to announce Heritage Distilling as the first branded partner in this development effort.”

The Tonto Apache Tribe is the second Native Indian group to announce their entrance to the Tribal Beverage Network. The first member was the Chehalis Tribe who joined forces with Heritage in 2018 to successfully lobby against Congress to repeal the ban on distilleries in Indian country. Talking Cedar, the Chehalis’ distillery and TBN’s first member, opened its doors in 2020 in Washington state, making it the first tribal-owned distillery in the U.S. and the first distillery allowed in Indian country since 1834. Heritage has several other tribes signed up under its model with announcements for each location and tribal partnership to be unveiled based on each tribe’s respective timeline for development. For more information on Heritage Distilling Company and the Tribal Beverage Network, visit heritagedistilling.com.

About Heritage Distilling Company, Inc.

Heritage Distilling Company, Inc.®, currently a subsidiary of Heritage Distilling Holding Company, Inc., was founded in 2011 by Justin and Jennifer Stiefel. Heritage is among the premier independent craft spirits distilleries in the United States offering a variety of whiskeys, vodkas, gins, and rums produced mainly from local, sustainably sourced ingredients. Heritage has been the most awarded craft distillery in North America by the American Distilling Institute for the past ten years out of more than 2,600 craft distilleries. To accelerate its national wholesale distribution growth strategy, Heritage founded the Tribal Beverage Network (TBN) to collaborate with Native American tribes and develop Heritage-branded distilleries, brands, and tasting rooms and to develop brands unique to the tribes, to serve patrons of tribal casinos and entertainment venues, creating compelling social and economic benefits for participating tribal communities while allowing the tribes another channel through which to exercise tribal sovereignty.

About the Tonto Apache Tribe

The Tonto Apache Tribe is located adjacent to the town of Payson (originally named Te-go-suk, Place of the Yellow Water), in northwestern Gila County approximately 95 miles northeast of Phoenix and 100 miles southeast of Flagstaff, Arizona. Consisting of 85 acres, it’s the smallest land base reservation in the state of Arizona.

The total population of the Tonto Apache Reservation is approximately 140 of which 110 are enrolled tribal members. 102 members live on the reservation (Tonto Apache Tribe, 1994). One-third of the tribal members are under the age of 16 (BIA, Indians of Arizona, 1994).

The Tonto Apache are the direct descendants of the Tontos who lived in the Payson vicinity long before the advent of the Anglo. The large Rio Verde Reserve, near Camp Verde, was established in 1871 for the Tonto and Yavapai Indians. The Reserve was dissolved in 1875 when they were forcibly

moved to the San Carlos Apache Reservation. Some Tontos gradually returned to Payson after 20 years of exile to find white settlers had taken much of their land. Today, legislation is pending which will provide them trust title to the land upon which they reside.

Tribal members are well known in the art community for their outstanding bead work and basketry, which have won them national recognition and can be purchased on the reservation.

About The Apache Corners Initiative

Apache Corners is a multiyear development managed by aLocal Solutions on behalf of the Tonto Apache Nation. In addition to the recently announced Heritage Distilling Company location, the Apache Corners master plan includes a grocery store, new health care clinic, restaurants, new convenience store, manufacturing and distribution spaces, office space and expanded accommodations and amenities at the Mazatzal Casino & Hotel in Payson, AZ. Total investment in the project is expected to be nearly \$100 million once all development is complete. More information can be found at www.apachecorners.com/

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