

Aurora store that helped launch breweries to close after 30 years

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BUSINESSDEN

Even though her longtime home-brewing shop is closing, Michelle Reding is happy. The move is one of the last straws in her yearslong road to retirement. That started when Dry Dock Brewing Co., the beer brand she and Kevin DeLange started in 2005, moved its production to Great Divide's facility in 2023. It accelerated in the past year, when Dry Dock was acquired by Longmont's Left Hand Brewing and announced it was moving its longtime Aurora taproom to Denver.

And now, at the end of next month, The Brew Hut will close after 30 years at 15120 E. Hampden Ave. in Aurora.

"It's great for me, honestly. I'm in a really good place," Reding, who is in her 50s, told BusinessDen. "It's been emotionally hard over the last three years, but it's gone in pieces. And each piece has moved me toward the next beginning."

In 2002, Reding and her then-husband DeLange bought The Brew Hut from Scott Newcomb, who opened the home-brewing supply store in 1995. Business grew "double-digits, easy," each year through the early 2010s, she said, before many of their customers started opening breweries themselves.

That list includes Downhill Brewing in Parker, Lone Tree Brewing Co., Launch Pad Brewery in Aurora and Joyride Brewing in Edgewater, Reding said. They all got their start with products and ingredients from The Brew Hut, which is next door to Dry Dock's taproom. The store also sold wine- and cheese-making equipment out of its 4,100 square feet.

"That's what we're going to miss — watching people try their first batch and make their first beer, no matter if good and bad they would come in and be all excited for us to try it," she said. "It was like watching your kids learn how to ride a bike and really take off."

But over the past decade, outside of a pandemic-induced spike when people couldn't leave their homes, sales have been steadily declining.

That was one of the reasons for closing, Reding said. The Brew Hut's lease is also up at the end of February, so it didn't make sense to renew when so much about her and Dry Dock's situation had changed, she said.

She and DeLange have been trying to sell the spot, where they also taught classes, for the past 10 months, but nothing materialized.

"One of the most common reasons was, 'I talked to my wife and she said no,' " Reding said after a laugh.

Before she can sail off into the sunset, Reding is working on getting the new Dry Dock outpost opened at the former Pub on Pearl space in Wash Park. She, along with seven friends and family members, purchased the real estate 1101 S. Pearl St. on Jan. 9 for \$2.5 million, according to public records.

Note

That purchase is separate from the taproom business, she said, even though she owns a stake in Dry Dock's parent company, the Left Hand Collective. Once the spot is up and running, she won't be involved in its day-to-day operations. She said she's working on hiring a property manager for the building now, which houses five other tenants.

"The plan is to retire and travel and do yoga and bike and ski and hike," she said. "Just all things Colorado."