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## Local Community & Business News



### Blue Shark Vodka Becoming a Favorite in the NC Mountains

With new distilleries opening across the state, there is one in particular making waves from the coast to the mountains of North Carolina. Blue Shark Vodka is the shark that “doesn’t bite.”

Founded in Wrightsville Beach, this smooth spirit has made its way to area ABC stores, bars and restaurants. Beyond its taste, which has garnered national tasting awards, customers may spot the signature Blue Shark Vodka bottle on a bar—a hand-blown glass shark sits at the bottom of the bottle and glassblowers create the bottle around them. While all the bottles have the same general shape and size, no two handmade bottles are exactly alike.

The focus behind Blue Shark, according to founder Mark Bloomquist, was to create a spirit celebrating North Carolina ingredients while also creating awareness of the unique sharks and marine life that make coastal areas thrive ecologically.

The brand launched in 2019 to early success before hurdling over supply chain shortages during the COVID pandemic as a fledgling company. But Bloomquist said that their team found a way to persevere.

“After spending decades in the water as a diver, I wanted to create something, along with my family, to share with the world and get the message out about how misunderstood sharks can be,” he said. “The blue shark is so incredibly docile and when you see them underwater they are magnificent. We knew we were starting to create something truly special with our shark concept, and then we found our hero ingredient—North Carolina sweet corn.”

Bloomquist and his daughter, Brooke, their master distiller, came across an heirloom variety of sweet corn in Polkton and crafted a vodka recipe around the ingredient. The farmer, “Farmer Jeff,” is still the exclusive provider for their vodka, even as it expands into South Carolina, Nevada and California.

Since launching, the vodka has claimed more than 20 awards at national contests for both taste and bottle design, including two back-to-back Platinum SIP awards medals in 2020 and 2021. The company also launched several other bottles in their line with unique artist-driven designs including a limited edition bottle by world famous ocean muralist Wyland.

Blue Shark also partners with The Atlantic Shark Institute each year for a shark tagging program, “Tag a Blue or Two,” sponsored by the vodka. A portion of proceeds from every bottle contribute to critical shark research. Shark populations, sadly, are dwindling. But scientists at The Atlantic Shark Institute believe gathering data through shark tagging could help to pinpoint both the causes of this crisis and, thanks in part to vodka drinkers, a solution.

Visit [BlueSharkVodka.com](http://BlueSharkVodka.com) to learn more. Available now at most North Carolina ABC stores.



### Women’s Fund of the Blue Ridge: Making an Impact and Changing Lives

The Women’s Fund of the Blue Ridge (WFBR) mission is to create positive change for women and girls in the High Country through collective giving. The WFBR has been positively impacting our community through its grant-making initiatives since 2006. Over \$1.9 million has been granted to local nonprofits and community-based organizations that develop and implement projects and programs benefiting women and girls in Ashe, Avery, and Watauga Counties.

Funds from the membership program and the *Power of the Purse* and *Bourbon & Barbeque* events support the annual grant-making process. Currently, over 80 members give annually to the membership program. The organization is confident that this number will continue to grow as they work hard sharing their mission and changing lives.

Erin Brockovich was the guest speaker at the 2022 *Power of the Purse Patron’s Party and Luncheon* in late June. She delivered a powerful, entertaining, and inspiring speech to over 400 guests, using a creative word, “stick-to-it-iveness,” throughout her presentation. “The word aligns perfectly with our goals to remain determined and persistent in improving the lives of women and girls in the High Country,” said WFBR organizers.

The 2022 *Bourbon and Barbeque* event was held in September, where seventy-five guests attended to celebrate men and women who support the WFBR mission. The success of these programs and events will make it possible for the Women’s Fund of the Blue Ridge to grant over \$225,000 to many deserving nonprofits for their 2023 projects and programs in the focus areas of Education, Human Services, Health and Wellness, and Empowerment. The 2023 grantees were announced in mid-November.

**Save the Date** – Princess Sarah Culberson will be the guest speaker at the Women’s Fund of the Blue Ridge 2023 *Power of the Purse* luncheon on Thursday, June 15, 2023, at the Grandview Ballroom at App State. Learn more at [www.womensfundoftheblueridge.org](http://www.womensfundoftheblueridge.org).