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Lexington bourbon maker expanding, building distillery with UK coach Mark Stoops

BY JANET PATTON AND BETH MUSGRAVE



Turner Commons is a mixed-use development off of Main Street and North Forbes Road in Lexington, KY. It will include an indoor event space and outdoor green space. *Lord, Aeck, Sargent*



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Developers say an existing water tower above the distillery will be wrapped to look like a bourbon barrel with the Turner Commons and RD1 Spirits logos and will light up at night. Ryan C. Hermens rhermens@herald-leader.com



RD1 Spirits, the spirits brand that counts University of Kentucky football coach Mark Stoops among its owners, is building a new distillery and tourism center in Lexington. The new site at Turner Commons just off Leestown Road is expected to open this summer. *Provided*

A Lexington distillery with ties to University of Kentucky football coach Mark Stoops is expanding into a new development. RD1 Spirits, of which Stoops is a shareholder, will break ground at Turner Commons off Leestown Road on a \$5 million new brand destination site and craft Kentucky bourbon distillery.

RD1 Spirits' bourbon and whiskeys are produced by Western Kentucky Distilling Co. in Beaver Dam, which has several owners in common with RD1 Spirits. Besides Stoops, partners in RD1 Spirits include national brand ambassador Barry Brinegar, CEO Mike Tetterton, Marsha Couch and Raj Patel.

Tetterton said RD1 Spirits new location will be a tourism draw for Lexington and Central Kentucky and anchor what he called an “amazing” new city amenity and entertainment venue.

“The new site will be just a few minutes from the existing Distillery District and from downtown Lexington ... with a restaurant right beside us and two more as well as about 20 AirBnbs,” he said. “You can come from out of town, stay at an Airbnb, walk to restaurants, tour us, go to Frankfort, Louisville, any of the distilleries, then come back and have a cocktail with us and dinner right here.”

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Kentucky Wildcats head coach Mark Stoops is an investor in RD1 Spirits. Silas Walker
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In December, the Kentucky Tourism Development Finance Authority approved economic incentives of more than \$500,000 for the new project, which will be part of a 40-acre mixed-use development and more than 600 parking spots that received approval from Lexington’s Urban County Planning Commission in December 2022. The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council gave final approval to the zone change in February 2023.

RD1 Spirits will move from its current spot on Manchester in the former Pepper Distillery rickhouse when the new distillery opens in July or August 2024. The new space will more the double the size of RD1’s tasting room and gift shop and add a small pot still for research and development.

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WHAT THE NEW LEXINGTON DISTILLERY WILL HAVE

The two-floor distillery building will anchor the new Turner Commons development, sitting just off West Main Street, according to the plans on the website. It will be opposite a new entertainment venue called The Rail.

The distillery and other buildings will be part of the former tobacco warehouse area at 1409 N. Forbes Rd.

Turner Commons also will include restaurants, bars, retail space, 25 townhomes and offices and industrial operations. About 14 commercial buildings and a new road will be built on the long skinny tract adjacent to the railroad tracks near Lorillard Lofts, according to the development plans.

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An existing water tower above the distillery will be wrapped to look like a bourbon barrel with the Turner Commons and RD1 Spirits logos, all lit up at night, for a highly visible sign.

“It will be iconic,” Tetterton said.

In December 2022, developer Daren Turner told the planning commission he hoped to locate the distiller as well as a bar called Paws and Pints and a pickleball group on site. Battle Axes, an ax throwing and entertainment venue, already is tucked near the back of the property.

“We have seen a lot of interest in the property,” Turner said. “That area of town has long been under-served in terms of restaurants and retail.” WHAT IS RD1 SPIRITS? RD1 Spirits launched in 2020. Its first releases were named after William Tarr, who owned Lexington’s first registered distillery, RD1.

The Old Wm. Tarr Manchester Reserve won several medals at blind-tasting spirits contests. Tetterton, a Lexington businessman who started Hometown Suites and then sold the concept to Red Roof Inn, also started Creative Lodging Solutions, which was bought out in 2017. He and his business partner Couch joined Stoops as original investors. Kentucky Wildcats head coach Mark Stoops is an investor in RD1 Spirits.

“We were going to be silent partners. We thought it was a going to be a neat business to be in,” Tetterton said. Eventually they became majority investors and took control of the company and Tetterton got involved in the day to day business.

The first RD1 Spirits releases used bourbon and rye made at Green River Distilling in Owensboro, which was bought out by Bardstown Bourbon Co. in July 2022. Tetterton and some other RD1 Spirits investors partnered with the former Green River team Jacob Call and JD Edwards to establish Western Kentucky Distilling Co., which now makes RD1’s spirits, according to Tetterton.

In 2022, RD1 released its existing portfolio of four bourbons: A straight Kentucky bourbon, a version finished with French oak, a version finished with oak and with maple barrels and a version finished with Brazilian amburana wood.

Western Kentucky Distilling will continue to produce the whiskey, which is aged in Nicholasville, he said, with a new 800-gallon pot still in Lexington making between 50 to 100 barrels a year for experimental research and development with more wood finishes.

Visitors to the new RD1 Spirits site in Turner Commons will be able to sample different existing bourbons as well as some in development. They also will be able to do custom blending and even bottle and keep the results if they like, Tetterton said.

Read more at:

<https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/bourbon/article283830228.html>