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Stuart's The Crafted Keg helped get 64-ounce growlers legalized

Downtown Stuart's The Crafted Keg deserves a tip of the hat from Florida beer enthusiasts.

Or a clink of the growlers.

After three failed attempts by the state Legislature and \$800,000 spent by major beer distributors on lobbyists, the Florida House last week voted unanimously — before lurching to an early stop of the session Tuesday — to legalize the 64-ounce, refillable beer jugs that are a standard size in the industry and legal in every state except Florida.

The bill was pushed by Senate president hopeful Sen. Jack Latvala, R-Clearwater, and House majority leader Rep. Dana Young, R-Tampa, who on the floor last week said "it was a lot harder than it should have been."

The Crafted Keg played a role in making it happen.

Late last year, the



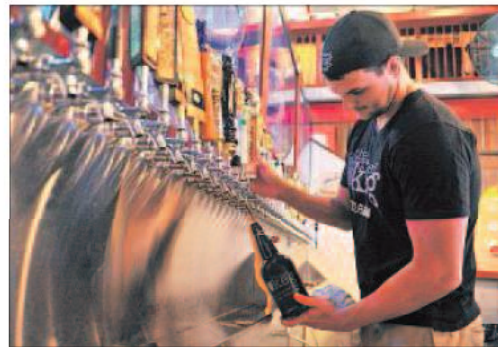
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downtown Stuart pub started a conversation with the Pacific Legal Foundation, a nonprofit that had been seeking a brewery to take on a lawsuit against the state regarding the growler issue. Attorney Mark Miller of the law firm said Florida is the only state to outlaw the 64-ounce growlers, though some states have restrictions.

The local bar's owner, Matthias Piasecki, was quick to hop on the opportunity to become the plaintiff in the case, claiming government overreach.

Piasecki's beer business, like many others, has been affected by



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"I'm very proud of him. I'm glad he took the initiative to get it done because somebody had to do it," said Max Piasecki, assistant manager at The Crafted Keg on Colorado Avenue in Stuart, after filling a 32-ounce growler Thursday for a customer. Piasecki's brother Matthias Piasecki, owner of The Crafted Keg, help legalize the 64-ounce refillable beer jug, known as a growler, in Florida.

the Prohibition-era ban. Tourists often visit the pub with their 64-ouncers, only to hear the confusing news that Florida bars can fill quart and gallon growlers, but not the convenient and most popular six-pack

equivalent in between.

"We had been hearing for years that the law was going to change, but I think the (Legislature) was trying to get away with not having to address it," Piasecki said. "There needed to be more

light shed on this. And I thought, what do we have to lose?"

When the lawsuit became public, it garnered national attention. CBS "This Morning," for one, aired a segment featuring the local bar and its growler saga.

"As far as I know, no one else had sued the state over this," Miller said. He is representing Piasecki, who plans to drop the case once Gov. Rick Scott signs the bill.

"I think the suit forced the state to look at the law and realize it was indefensible," Miller said.

Although the bill wouldn't go into effect until the summer, the growler victory already is being celebrated by brew spots across the state.

"It's been several years of going back and forth and fighting for this," said Nick Bischoff, co-owner of Sailfish Brewing Company in Fort Pierce. "Growlers definitely are a way

to increase revenue, but this helps the consumer as well."

Growlers aren't just a practical way to take craft beer home. They're de rigueur in much of the beer-aficionado world.

"There are some people who carry a growler they've had for a long time, or a vintage one, or a special one they want filled," Bischoff said. "They want their own 64-ounce growlers filled, and now we're going to be able to do that."

Like Bischoff, Piasecki is excited to start selling his bar's own collection of half-gallon jugs, too.

"It's exciting to be part of the change," Piasecki said. "And exciting to finally be able to place our order of 64-ounce growlers."

Cheers to that.

Zaimarie De Guzman is a columnist for Treasure Coast Newspapers. This column reflects her opinion.