

# 2020 SUCCESS STORY

DICKINSON



NORTH DAKOTA  
SMALL BUSINESS  
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## PHAT FISH BREWING

**DICKINSON, ND** --- Husband and wife, Tony and Kelli Scharf, have always loved their community of Dickinson, ND where they've resided for almost a decade. They dreamed of bringing everyone closer together but never really knew how. After lots of research and prayers, Phat Fish Brewing was born. The company was built on the values of a having a place where the whole family can go to enjoy a tasty and unique dining experience and locally made beers.

Tony Scharf is a U.S. Army Ranger Veteran. After retiring from the military, Tony and his wife, Kelli, didn't know what was next for them. Kelli worked in the banking industry and Tony for the oil and gas industry but both of them knew their current jobs would not allow them the life they were truly wanting to lead. They wanted to have the freedom to be a part of their children's lives while also doing something they were passionate about throughout the community of Dickinson. The Scharf's tossed around ideas for a few years and wrestled with the idea of opening a brewery/pizza restaurant over and over again. However, they never really knew where to begin. They sat on the idea for a while until they stumbled into the Department of Veterans Affairs where they had heard about the North Dakota Small Business Development

Center and how the program could help.

They were soon connected with Darryl Neubert, business advisor for the Dickinson Center at that time. In October 2017, the Scharf's dove head-first into the initial planning process and never looked back.

"We didn't expect to get as much out of the advising session as we did! Darryl took his time and helped us with every aspect of what we needed to do to get the information to make good decisions," explained Kelli.

After discussing all their ideas and reviewing the business plan with Darryl, both Tony and Kelli knew they wanted to pursue the brewery and restaurant business whole-heartedly. They flew to Denver, Colorado, where they completed brewery immersion course and pizza school. Once completed, the next step was to determine where they were going to set up shop. The Scharf's were able



to acquire a former Dickinson State University property that was originally built in the early 1900s by the ND Dept. of Transportation.

Financing for project came together with the support of local lenders, Stark Development Corporation, Dakota Business Lending and an SBA 504 loan.

Throughout the process, whenever they felt unsure about a decision or idea, they returned to the Dickinson SBDC as a sounding board for ideas and resources



to help move Phat Fish Brewing past the planning phase.

It was a long and grueling year and a half of planning and preparation but in

June 2019 Phat Fish Brewing opened its doors. Today, the business just celebrated the one-year anniversary from its initial opening and the Scharf's couldn't be happier. The constant support the community has shown has got them to the point they're at today.

"We started with a plan and by reaching out to the community, friends, and family,



we were able to open our eyes to new and different ideas that would not only help our business grow but give the community a fun, family-friendly place to gather" Kelli stated.

Phat Fish Brewing success has been featured in The Dickinson Press, KOA Camping's Top 10 Breweries in American to Visit list, and FOX News. They've also received awards for Community Development Project of the Year in 2019 and received five Best of the Western Edge awards in 2020.



The advice Tony and Kelli leave all aspiring entrepreneurs is to make sure to do your research. Know that it's going to be one hundred times harder than what you are originally planning.

Also, they explained, "Anyone who has a goal or dream that is sitting at home not knowing where to start will most likely stay there if they don't know about the help you can receive. If it wasn't for the VA or SBDC, we would probably still be thinking about it."

