



Musician and whiskey entrepreneur Tommy Brunett salutes a full crowd.

Straight Up

A local musician branches out into the world of whiskey

For the last 12 years, Tommy Brunett and his acoustic guitar “Pancake” have played their original blend of rock ‘n’ roll and classic country to crowds across the country. They were seen together on Conan O’Brien and Good Morning America, as well as opening for acts such as ZZ Top, Old 97’s, Ted Nugent, George Thorogood, and The Charlie Daniels Band.

In 2010, Brunett released his debut studio album, *Hell or High Water*, to rave reviews. He wrote *Drinkin’ Song* as a tribute to his father, Big Joe, and his Grandpa Joe. The lyrics are based on a story that his father told him when he was a boy.

Some of the best times in my life, I can’t remember/ living hard and drinking the same way/ I think of all the wasted days, I start to tremble/ and, son, you’re better off to do the same.

“Whiskey has always been a part of my heritage,” said Brunett, who grew up in Webster and now lives in Rochester near Brighton. “My

father and grandfather would drink boiler-makers, when you drop a shot of whiskey into a beer.”

After 30 years as a musician and branding specialist, Brunett is striking a new chord in the whiskey business. Starting this fall, Iron Smoke Whiskey will be available in stores and online. Handcrafted and aged in charred oak barrels in Seneca Falls, Iron Smoke Whiskey is smooth with just a hint of sweet apple wood smoke.

“I thought of this concept to put two great American pastimes together,” said Brunett, “making whiskey and smoking barbecue.”

Two years ago, Brunett and Iron Smoke Whiskey co-founders Dan Lynch and Steve Brown started brainstorming ideas for the new product. “We wanted to make a handcrafted, small-batch whiskey using apple wood smoke,” said Brunett. “There are all these flavors of whiskey out there right now and we just want to keep it real.”

Before taking their concept to a local distillery, Brunett and Lynch used a backyard smoker to smoke apple wood chips. “There was no conscious decision to go after our market space,” said Brunett, “It was just about making a great American product.”

Iron Smoke Whiskey is made with real upstate apple wood and water from the glacier-formed Fingerlakes. While the region is known for beer and wine



production, whiskey and other spirits are still rarely chartered territory. “There’s hardly any competition,” said Brunett, who adds that it took nearly two years to find the perfect blend for Iron Smoke Whiskey. After a period of trial and error, batch number nine proved to be the winner, described by a top Los Angeles mixologist “like getting a hug from an old friend.”

To gear up for the big reveal this fall, Brunett and Iron Smoke Whiskey are smoking conversation through social media and area events. They are currently selling hip apparel for men and women through the website, and are also planning a guitar giveaway to coincide with the introduction of the product.

“You have to be able to amplify your message,” said Brunett, who also moonlights as owner and branding specialist for creative agency Sixteen Ton. “It’s about an authentic message that people can relate to.”

For Brunett and his partners, the buck doesn’t stop at the whiskey bottle. They are creating a barbecue sauce and dry rub to complement the flavors of the whiskey, as well as apple wood smoked bourbon.

“We want to be the purveyors of great whiskey and good times,” says Brunett. “If we accomplish that, then we can make anything happen.” www.ironsmokewhiskey.com

— Michelle Inclema Shippers



Tommy Brunett’s Iron Smoke Whiskey was two years in the making.