

## UPDATE #5: COVID-19 Eight Oaks Distillery

### Distillery Owner Chad Butters

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/73476/borne-battle-covid-update-5-chad-butters/>

[00:00:00] **Music**

[00:00:10] **Opening Monologue**

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** Wednesday, April 8th, 2020 this is *Borne the Battle*.

I'm your host Marine Corps veteran Tanner Iskra; coronavirus, COVID update number five. Hope everyone is safe and healthy and taken heed to CDC's social distancing policy. I just wanted to get on here and pass as much info as I can and later we'll hear from Army veteran Chad Butters, who's doing what he can.

He quickly switched the mission of his distillery and turned it into a sanitizer manufacturing center, and he gives some great updates on that entire industry.

But first I wanted to tell you that the VA has two new websites that you should be taking a look at. There is now a mental health page specifically for coronavirus. It is [mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus](https://mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus). On it, you'll find resources like tips to manage stress, VA's moving forward course that is designed to help you to identify your own [00:01:00] personal stressors and how to help mitigate those stresses.

A link to the national center for PTSD, guidance on managing stress and a link to CDC's guidance to COVID-19 mental health support systems. There are also reminders on there, like avoid too much news. No kidding. Stay connected to friends and family. And if you're gonna find sources of information, stay informed using official sources like the VA, like this podcast, and the CDC.

Again, that site is [mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus](https://mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus). Another website you should look up and get your pen out, ready because it's important for a lot of veterans. It's [myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/ss20200401-medication-refills-coronavirus](https://myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/ss20200401-medication-refills-coronavirus).

On that page is a blog that tells you how you can refill medications, either online, or with the new RX refill mobile app, by telephone, or by mail with either a portal or an online link on how to do each. So important for those that are having to shelter in place but need their medication.

Also, this came out of the official Twitter of the VA's national veterans' sports program @sports4vets with the number four. VA's golden age games scheduled for June 22nd through the 27th and the wheelchair

games scheduled for July 3rd through the 8th have been officially canceled over COVID-19 concerns.

The tweet that was dated on April 2nd said that the plans are in place to bring both events back to Madison and Portland in 2021.

Okay. We got two COVID related news releases to bring to you. The first one is - VA, New Jersey Healthcare System, East Orange [00:03:00] Campus to assist COVID-19 response. The US Department of Veterans Affairs opened 20 beds, 15 acute care and five intensive care at its East Orange, New Jersey Medical Center on April 1st, to non-veteran critical and non-critical COVID-19 patients to help assist the Northern New Jersey region and its COVID-19 response efforts.

The VA's decision comes in response to request the department received from FEMA and the state of New Jersey. VA's decision was made after determining this action would not negatively impact veteran care.

And finally, and this is a big one, VA extends financial benefits and claims relief to veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs, announced on April 3rd, my birthday, a number of actions to provide veterans with financial benefits and claims help amid VA's COVID-19 response. The financial relief actions include the following until further notice: suspending all actions on veteran debts under the jurisdiction of the [00:04:00] Treasury Department and suspending a collection action or extending repayment terms on preexisting VA debts as the veteran prefers.

For benefit debts, veterans can contact the VA debt management center at 1-800-827-0648. For healthcare debts, veterans can contact the health resource center at 1-888-827-4817. The benefits and claims relief actions include giving the veterans the option to submit their paperwork late for the following actions: perfecting claims, challenging adverse decisions, submitting notices of disagreement, and it's re and submitted substantive appeals, and responding to supplemental statements of the case.

Veterans, your questioning claim extensions can simply submit them with any late filled paperwork and veterans do not, and veterans do not have to proactively request an extension in advance. For added convenience. VA's will also accept typed [00:05:00] and digital signatures instead of wet signatures on its forms.

Those with any questions on any of this can call 1-800-827-1000. Some great news and I hope to go in depth with this a little bit more, with maybe a subject matter expert in the very near future.

Also, in this release, there are some board of veteran appeals information. For veterans who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and need immediate action on their appeals as opposed to file an extension, the board of veterans' appeals will advance their appeal on docket, otherwise known as an AOD. To apply for an advance on docket, Go to [bva.va.gov/customerservice.asp](http://bva.va.gov/customerservice.asp)

It's a lot of info. A great thing about a podcast you have the ability to go backward. All right, finally, in all the news going on, every once in a while, you come across a story that hopefully can inspire others. I know this one inspired me. No matter [00:06:00] what.

You, you have a talent in this world. You do. And sometimes all you need is to figure out how to best use that talent for the situation at hand. Retired Army Chief Warrant Officer Chad Butters owns Eight Oaks Distillery up in New Tripoli, Pennsylvania. And, he was one of the first to turn his distillery into a sanitizer manufacturing center after he witnessed all the hoarding that was going on and his community.

We were able to catch up with him this week and well, in addition to giving us an on-the-ground update on how dire the sanitizer situation is for first responders for the medical community, for everyone. He's got a message for all of us here.

Take a listen.

#### [00:06:40] Outro Music

#### [00:06:50] Interview with Chad Butters

**TI:** So, Chad, first of all, thanks for being on *Borne the Battle*. When I first saw your story on CNN, I saw, I mean, that was within the first couple of days of everything happening. How did they find you so quick?

**Chad Butters (CB):** [00:00:11] Yeah. That was a, it was pretty incredible. And I don't know the answer to that. W - I think social media is just, you know, sometimes there actually is this whole concept of going viral, right?

**TI:** [00:00:23] Yeah.

**CB:** [00:00:23] I think that's, that's what happened there because Sunday night, we sent that Facebook post out saying we were going to take action on this.

And, by, you know, Tuesday, I believe, CNN had a crew here.

**TI:** [00:00:36] Tuesday.

**CB:** [00:00:37] And they, they essentially, yeah. I believe it was Tuesday. Yeah. Yeah. If I'm not mistaken, so, yeah, within, you know, within 36 hours, there's a CNN crew here, and they basically followed us around all day that day. So, yeah, I think just timing, things all kinda came together at the right time.

**TI:** Incredible. Army veteran, correct? [00:01:00] Retired chief warrant officer?

**CB:** That's a fact.

**TI:** Chad, tell me about your operation, what you guys are doing out there in Pennsylvania - what you were doing before this and what you're doing now. Why did CNN come in the first place?

**CB:** So, what we did is, right after my retirement, we started this business here in New Tripoli, Pennsylvania. It's a farm distillery. So, we grow wheat, rye, corn, and barley, and then turn that into bourbon and rye whiskey, vodka, gin, and a whole lot of other stuff. So, we're about a little over four years old now.

And as this coronavirus thing, you know, was in the news really, since what, January, I guess you kind of started seeing it pop up and -

**TI:** Yeah.

**CB:** and then it became more and more apparent that, you know, this was going to be something that we were all going to have to react to. And, so, as, as we got into mid-March, it was, you know, very obvious that this is going to have a direct impact on, you know, on us individually in our business and, you know, the community and our country and all that.

So, there [00:02:00] was just a moment in time there, somewhere around the 13th or so of March that we, we were just kind of thinking about things. And. What it meant to us and, and, and how we can kind of be proactive. We know, what could we do to take action in this particular moment, you know, was with what we had as far as our assets and resources and, you know, skill sets and plant equipment and, you know, how could we activate that into something good?

And, and our vision, mission, and values of our company are really just, you know, at the heart of everything we do is, is being a positive impact on our community. And, and so we were just trying to figure out how can we be you know, an active part of this instead of just letting this thing bulldoze us. And it was apparent that hand sanitizer was being hoarded and kind of, you know, the price was being driven up.

The, the day I looked at it, the price was \$320 an ounce online for hand sanitizer. And that's [00:03:00] where I was like, okay, this is ridiculous. Hand sanitizers, nothing more than high proof alcohol and a couple other small ingredients, you know? And that's it. So, you know, I think we can make it. And so, we just made the decision kind of right then and there that we would go ahead and do whatever it took to make hand sanitizer.

So, we made an announcement to our, our crew that we were going to be shutting down our operations as far as, you know, our tasting room bar area -

**TI:** Yeah.

**CB:** bottle sales, all of that. And we were gonna just, kind of focus all our resources on, on the hand sanitizer project and really not knowing the criticality of this, of the demand of this particular product.

I'm really not until the last week cause that become apparent.

**TI:** That's amazing. How were you able to pivot to hand sanitizer so quickly?

**CB:** Well, it really is just the hardest part about hand sanitizer is making the alcohol and the alcohol takes, you know, it takes us about a week to go from grain to glass. And, [00:04:00] and it's a big, you know, it's a process. You've got to have equipment, specialized equipment in order to do that. But after the alcohol, which we do that every single day

and, you know, as far as making hand sanitizer is just taking that alcohol at the end of the distillation and mixing it with some hydrogen peroxide and some glycerin.

**TI:** Yeah.

**CB:** And that's all there is. That's all there is to it. So, it's very straightforward. You just have to, there's a different supply chain that you have to come up with as far as bottles and labels and ingredients, and there's a slightly different process.

But other than that, it, it is, it is very straightforward. And luckily, we had, you know. Guidance from the World Health Organization on exactly what this formula should be in order for it to be effective and all of that. So, it wasn't just us kind of arbitrarily making up some concoction.

**TI:** Very good. Very good. So, you started this around March 12th, March 13th. This'll come out about, this interview will come out about the first week of April. How much have you made since you've [00:05:00] started and, and looking at when this gets released?

**CB:** Yeah. So, thinking about, you know, the 1st of April, right now, what we've done is just, you try to piecemeal, the supplies together to create as much as you can right out of the gate. So, we've probably put out 5,000 bottles at this point -

**TI:** Oh my gosh.

**CB:** As, as we record this right now, we're, we're waiting on, what is supposed to be delivered is about 8,000 gallons worth of, some ingredients that we need, and that will allow us to immediately scale up to produce about 12 to 15,000 bottles a day.

**TI:** Oh my gosh!

**CB:** Yeah. So that's, that's what we're intention is. And really that's all based on this demand and it's so much different and so much more than just consumer demand.

This is, this is people that have a critical need for the sanitizer. And I'm talking about COVID testing and treatment sites, health networks, first responders, US postal service, DoD, Department of Homeland Security. All of these folks, require, and then, you know, critical corporations as well.

Nestle water making, you know, the water that is being pushed out to people that need it. These are, these are people that have to do their job in order to keep our society functioning. Even in -

**TI:** those making ventilators right now.

**CB:** Yeah, exactly. You know, there's people out there doing this stuff and they have to have hand sanitizer.

And, and you know, the biggest frustration for me right now is the supply chain is, is very difficult to get up and running. And so you kind of get, you'll get a little bit and you'll be able to push out a little bit of product, and then you'll get a little bit more and be able to push out a little bit more.

So, the most frustrating piece to me is just talking to all of these people and hearing the urgency in their voice and how desperately they need this stuff. And us, you know, having to say, we're gonna help you, but we just can't help you yet. You know, as soon as the, these supplies get here, we'll push out more as fast as we can.

**TI:** So, the demand right now is more than the supply chain.

**CB:** Oh my gosh. By, by, I can't even, I can't even imagine the multiple, I mean, I'm, I'm really, really serious when I say that it is a very critical shortage and an exceptionally critical, areas that absolutely require it, and then desperately need it. So, yeah, this is, this is very much a mission for us

and for our, for our crew at this point. We consider ourself a mission critical organization. And we take this job very, very seriously at this point to do the best we can to get this out as quickly as we can, to the folks that need it.

**TI:** You know, when I watched that CNN piece, it seemed like it was more of a local area type of thing. But since then, it sounds like it has just scaled up to just immense like nation, worldwide demand that you've got now.

**CB:** There is definitely nationwide demand. We do get, you know, requests from all over the United States and frankly from around the world at this point. But we had to go back and kind of clarify our mission because, you know, one thing we don't want to do is be overwhelmed by events, right?

**TI:** Yeah.

**CB:** And, and kind of almost be dead in the water because there's so much to do.

So, our mission is to provide sanitizer to those in need. And we're starting with a local mission critical, you know, organizations that are out here, right here, you know, directly in our vicinity. And then we'll continue to work out. From that, you know, and kind of concentric circles. And, and we'll, we'll keep making this and keep pushing it out as quickly as we can until there's just simply no more demand.

And certainly, we're aware of and, and, and happy for the fact that there are a lot of other companies out there now, making hand sanitizer and it's necessary. I mean, the more the merrier, hope that everybody succeeds in getting out as much as they possibly can because the demand is just overwhelming.

**TI:** You know, I, it, I look at 9/11, I look at times like this and it's, it's, it's a time that, you know, they're unfortunate times, but it's also, it's also a time that where you see where America can come together.

**CB:** Oh, no doubt. Yeah.

**TI:** Is it true that you're, you're, you're not charging people or companies for the hand sanitizer that you're making?

How are you able to get by? Are you taking donations?

**CB:** Yeah. Yeah, that's a great point. So yes, we started this whole thing out, as a donation only, function. We have had, an incredible outpouring of support across the nation, going to our website and donating. Since then, we're able to, you know, utilize that, those donations to generate, you know, the bottles that we've generated so far, and, and many more, now.

We've got more donations and that will sustain this for some period of time. So, at this point, what's become apparent is, we - there's no way to meet the demand on donations alone. What we're going to do is we're going to use those donations. We'll donate all of them. Any product that those donations make will be donated for free to nonprofits, first responders, those that need it and can't afford it.

So, all of that is going to be absolutely donated for free. And then there's other organizations out there that need this, critically, and they can't afford to help offset the cost. So they're, you know, they'll contribute a little bit more, maybe, so that we can continue, this whole cycle of, of getting more and more product out to those that need it, regardless of whether you're, you have the ability to, pay for it or not, if you need hand sanitizer getting the hand sanitizer.

So, what's been awesome to watch. Is the community, whether that's the business community or individuals step up and where they can step up and make donations or say, "Hey, we'll buy a X amount of cases and we want to pay you this much money for it so you can continue the project." Or if it's a businesses that are reaching out and they see that we need a forklift and they offer, Hey, we can, you know, were a forklift company and we can get you a forklift and, and, uh, provide it for free. Or we're a trucking company and we can, we can get you some, you know, some transportation for free. I mean, we really do get an incredible outpouring from, everyone around us wherever, however they can help.

They're anxious to do just that.

**TI:** Incredible. Incredible. Chad, what compelled you to do this in the first place?

**CB:** It's, it's an interesting time right now, isn't it? Because typically when you have a, you know, a catastrophe or some national emergency or something like that, or even more local, it, it's, it's always people coming together that solve the problem. It's always physically they come together, and they build a house, or they come together and they make food for people or they come together and they, you know, help, you know, transport people to safety or whatever. And this and this particular environment that we're in, that's exactly the opposite of what is productive. Right? You, you don't want a gather as, as people. So, what do you do? And you know, I always just go, again, you go back to what, what is your purpose?

What is your mission and how can you, how can you effectively execute that under these conditions? And maybe it is something as simple as, you know, making a phone call and making a contribution to a nonprofit that is doing good work that you appreciate. Or, you know, maybe it's just deciding that,

Hey, when all this blows over, I'm going to volunteer more of my time, to my community, you know, for whatever you're passionate about.

but I think it all starts with purpose. You know, what is your purpose and what do you find important and, and how can you translate your skills that you, you know, built up over the years and, and have a, have a positive impact on your community?

**TI:** Very good. All right, Chad, this is your time. Take one minute. Take five minutes. What message do you have for veterans who are listening who might be listening to this or other fellow distilleries or other fellow veteran owned businesses? The floor is yours.

**CB:** Yeah. Well, you know, I think personally, I would have to say, you know, thank you to, all of these community members, that come together in these desperate times and, and want to contribute and want to make a difference and just want to be part of the solution in any way, shape, or form. So, we see examples of that every single day.

Whether those are veteran owned businesses or veterans themselves making contributions or, you know, frankly, there's. We were, we were just going over some mail this morning. My daughter is our general manager. She brought in the mail this morning -

**TI:** Yeah.

**CB:** And, we received many letters from veterans that are just, taking time out of their day to just, you know, say thanks and, and that they appreciate what we're doing.

**TI:** Wow.

**CB:** And you know, when you're, when you're getting kicked around on a daily basis trying to make this happen and trying to scale this up, there's a whole lot of frustrations, you know, as you go. And so even just, you know, people having words of encouragement is exceptionally helpful, to the entire crew, you know?

So, it's just. Anytime that you have these situations where you're at crisis, you see people that step up and, and you know, I'm, I'm really proud to be associated with so many that have and that continue to. So, you know, it's just, it's our pleasure to be part of it.

**[00:21:15] Outro Music**

**[00:21:20] Outro**

**TI:** I want to thank Chad for taking the time out of his extremely busy schedule to talk with us. For more information on what 8 Oaks Distillery is doing, you can visit them at [eighthoaksdistillery.com](http://eighthoaksdistillery.com). There, you can also find all their social media handles. That's all I got today, for more information on VA and coronavirus,

Visit [va.gov/coronavirus](http://va.gov/coronavirus). Everything that is out from the VA concerning this current pandemic is on that page. In addition for more information on not only coronavirus but all things VA, visit [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov) and follow us on social media, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, RallyPoint, [deptvetaffairs](http://deptvetaffairs), US Department of Veterans Affairs, no matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. Stay safe. Stay healthy. Call your loved ones and we'll see you right here. On Monday, take care.