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Hanna Lee Communications’ Ascot Awards Application for Town Branch Distillery’s “Mint Julep Nation” Bartender Campaign

Supporting Materials:

CoverageBook: <https://share.coveragebook.com/b/0d299437b5876e23>

Situation:

Launching Town Branch Distillery’s “Mint Julep Nation” Bartender Campaign

To generate buzz for its client, Town Branch Distillery, the first distillery to open in Lexington, Ky. since Prohibition, Hanna Lee Communications created and implemented the “Mint Julep Nation” Bartender Campaign.

The idea began as a way to leverage the media buzz around the running of the 147th Kentucky Derby and its signature cocktail, the *Mint Julep*. The challenge was that many legacy brands spend heavily right before the race to promote their spirits. In addition, we felt it was important to support the bartending community, which had been sidelined during the pandemic and needed an opportunity to be paid and have their creativity spotlighted on the national level, as well as locally.

We decided to get a head start and reached out months in advance to 13 noted bartenders across the U.S. We commissioned them to create their own original variations of the *Mint Julep* made with Town Branch Bourbon. We also interviewed them to find out their inspirations and how their ingredients and presentations paid homage to their hometowns, both large and small.

Their recipes were designed for the home bartender to recreate and participate vicariously in the festivities surrounding the “The Greatest Two Minutes in Sports.” But beyond Derby Day, these cocktails are delicious year round and for any occasion.

The participating bartenders included:

1. Austin, Texas (Brett Esler, Idle Hands/Armadillo Den)
 - ***Texas Julep*** - A nod to the “World Famous Peach” stands of Texas Hill Country with its use of black-peach tea
2. Chicago (Carley Gaskin, Hospitality 201)
 - ***Back to the Track Julep*** - Replaces sugar with honey and adds grapefruit for bright acidity to complement Chicago’s cold winters and beautiful summers
3. Clayton, North Carolina (Sharfiq Cosby, Revival 1869)
 - ***Vital Roots*** - A fruit-forward spin that gives proper credit to the enslaved African-American bartender, John Dabney, whose Hail Storm Mint Julep became the blueprint for the drink
4. Dublin, Ohio (Rebecca Monday, Vaso at the AC Hotel Columbus)
 - ***One Mint Julep*** - Named for a Ray Charles song, it incorporates housemade charred orange cordial and yuzu liqueur as Ohioans seek spring and summer flavors
5. Fort Lauderdale, Florida (Pete Sierwuk, The Dalmar)
 - ***...And Miami On The Inside*** - A tropical take that tips its hat to South Florida’s Cuban community and its *pastelitos* (guava pastries)
6. Las Vegas (Tony Abou-Ganim, Modern Mixologist)
 - ***Apricot Julep*** - A flavorful rendition that incorporates fresh apricot slices and apricot liqueur
7. Los Angeles (Sarah L.M. Mengoni, Kimpton Hotels & Historically Drinking)
 - ***Best Coast Julep*** - Honors Los Angeles’ health culture by using mango kombucha
8. Madison, Wisconsin (Daniel Dufek, Shanghai Speakeasy)
 - ***Early Spring Julep*** - A reinterpretation of the Mint Julep by way of the Wisconsin Old-Fashioned, with pomegranates subbing in for cherries
9. Nashville, Tennessee (Freddie Sarkis, Liquor Lab)
 - ***Julep Old-Fashioned*** - A Julep-inspired twist on the Old-Fashioned for whiskey-loving Nashville
10. New York (Anthony Baker, “Professor Baker”)
 - ***The Mint Chocolate Julep*** - Adds crème de cacao liqueur in homage to mint chocolate ice cream
11. New York (Lucinda Sterling, Middle Branch and Seaborne)
 - ***The Stretch Runner*** - Brings a new level of flavor complexity with the addition of cherry liqueur, ginger syrup, as well as shiso and anise hyssop leaves, with New York State applejack adding a local flavor
12. Sylva, North Carolina (Antoine Hodge, The Wine Bar & Cellar)
 - ***Mountain Honey Julep*** - An ode to local mountain orange blossom honey from North Carolina
13. Washington, D.C. (Deke Dunne, Allegory at the Eaton DC Hotel)
 - ***No Kings*** - Saluting Washington, D.C.’s graffiti culture, it swaps in a local cherry blossom bitter liqueur as its sweetener and uses Peychaud’s Bitters as a sprayed garnish

Objectives:

- Successfully launch and publicize Town Branch Distillery's "Mint Julep Nation" Bartender Campaign
- Position Town Branch Distillery as an advocate and supporter of the craft bartending community across the U.S.
- Create and/or reinforce relationships with key bartenders across the U.S.
- Underscore Town Branch Bourbon as an incredibly versatile spirit for a broad range of cocktail applications
- Leverage the implied third party endorsements of the participating bartenders
- Support Town Branch Distillery achieving its case sales goals

Strategy:

- Preempt the large legacy brands' communicating about the Kentucky Derby to grab mindshare and generate coverage prior to the deluge of messaging
- Champion craft bartenders across the U.S. and lend them the media's spotlight
- Layer in 13 local angles, namely the bartenders' localized recipes, to drive local coverage in their hometown markets

Bartender Relations:

- The agency reached out to select bartenders across the U.S. from coast-to-coast, who were already fans of the brand, as well as new bartenders who became fans thanks to samples that we arranged for them to try
- We made sure that the bartenders selected represented geographic, racial and gender diversity
- We worked closely with each bartender to develop their recipes that included Town Branch Bourbon, as well as ingredients that saluted their hometowns
- Once the recipes were created, we hired a bartender to recreate them at their bar, where we photographed each cocktail in its appropriate glassware

Media Relations:

- The agency wrote an in-depth press release announcing Town Branch Distillery's "Mint Julep Nation" Bartender Campaign
 - We quoted Tony Abou-Ganim, the Modern Mixologist in Las Vegas, and Lucinda Sterling of Seaborne in Brooklyn, N.Y.
 - The press release also included detailed recipes for making each cocktail, as well as the inspiration behind it and how it saluted their hometown

Video Production:

- The agency also produced a catchy Town Branch Distillery's "Mint Julep Nation" video in-house with a Kentucky Derby theme that touted the campaign and showed eye-catching photos of each cocktail

Results:

- Thanks to our bartender relations campaign, we were able to build and solidify relationships for Town Branch Distillery with top bartenders across the U.S., bringing their liquid to lips for the first time, in some cases
- The media relations campaign effectively communicated Town Branch Distillery's "Mint Julep Nation" Bartender Campaign and generated both national media and local media coverage, as was planned, reaching close to 225 million readers:
 - National Coverage
 - Dow Jones/Wall Street Journal's MarketWatch
 - <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/move-over-jim-beam-this-bourbon-newcomer-has-a-subtle-appeal-11619184710>
 - Forbes
 - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilyprice/2021/04/14/13-new-spins-on-the-classic-mint-julep-from-top-mixologists/?sh=332e3d6c4c6e>
 - Market Watch
 - <https://www.marketwatchmag.com/town-branch-bourbon-introduces-its-mint-julep-nation-for-derby-day/>
 - Thrillist
 - <https://www.thrillist.com/events/las-vegas/things-to-do-in-las-vegas-this-weekend>
 - Morningstar (Syndicated)
 - <https://www.morningstar.com/news/marketwatch/20210430529/for-kentucky-derby-mint-juleps-try-this-newcomer-bourbon-with-subtle-appeal>
 - Local Coverage
 - Edible Nashville
 - <https://ediblenashville.ediblecommunities.com/recipes/julep-old-fashioned>
 - Las Vegas Magazine
 - <https://lasvegasmagazine.com/entertainment/2021/apr/29/derby-day-las-vegas-pts-mint-julep-bourbon/>
 - Northern Virginia Magazine
 - <https://northernvirginiamag.com/food/food-features/2021/04/28/how-to-celebrate-the-kentucky-derby-at-home/>
- Amplified the media relations results through social media marketing across multiple platforms
- Positioned Town Branch Distillery as an advocate and supporter of the craft bartending community during the pandemic
- Reinforced Town Branch Bourbon a choice spirit for a wide range of cocktail applications that is preferred by bartenders across the U.S.

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