

# Getting Back to Business

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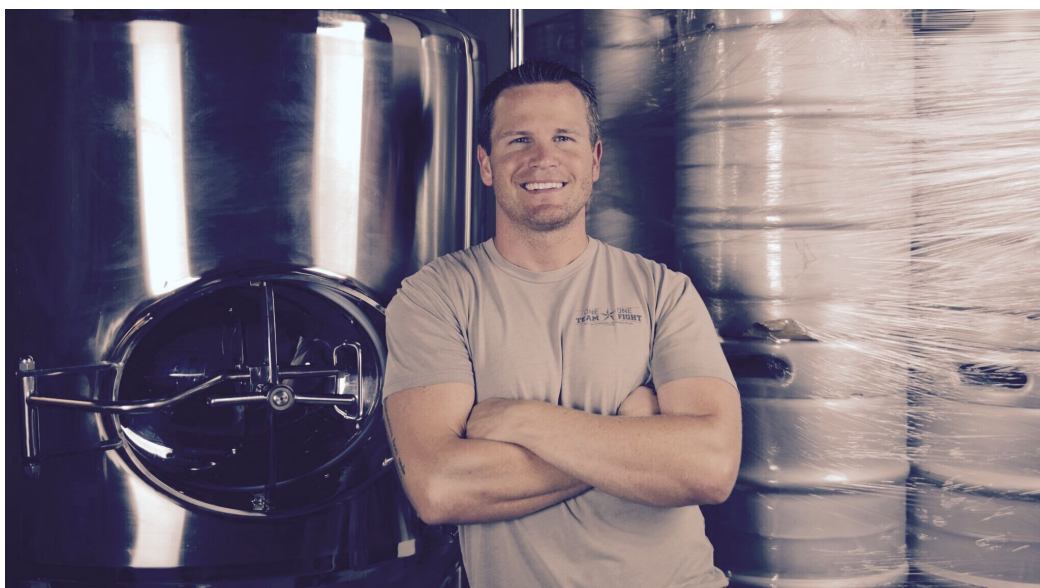
By Haley Shapley

Back in 2010, Navy SEAL Sean Haggerty was in Iraq when he really wanted a beer. There were none handy in the desert, so Haggerty got an idea: He'd brew his own. "An entrepreneurial light flicked off in my head," he remembered later. "That's when I said to myself, 'I'm going to start a brewery.'"

Seven years later, he was on the verge of doing just that when he heard about the new Veteran Ventures program at the University of California at San Diego. Housed at the Rady School of Management, the 10-week program is free and open to any veteran with an interest in entrepreneurship. Participants have the opportunity to compete for non-diluted funding and can access all the university's resources, from the 3-D printers and maker spaces to the faculty who are willing to share their expertise.

"We want to empower veterans in our community," Sandra Brown, vice chancellor of research at UC San Diego, said. "We are one of the largest veteran communities in the country, and I know what a challenge it is for veterans to transition out of the military. They need support for their entrepreneurial efforts."

Haggerty used Veteran Ventures to refine the go-to-market strategy for Protector Brewery, San Diego's first USDAcertified organic brewery. In a saturated market, they've found a way to stand out, selling 25,000 pints within the first 10 months. Now, Haggerty pays it forward by serving as a mentor.



*Sean Haggerty poses inside Protector Brewery in June 2017, when he first opened the brewery with support from Veteran Ventures. Protector Brewery photos by Mark Thorsen.*

“I truly believe that veterans are naturally primed to be entrepreneurs and work in small-team dynamics,” Haggerty said. “Just helping them find what they want to do and make an impact in the U.S. economy is very important to me.”

This idea of veterans helping veterans is at the core of the program. When UC San Diego was looking for someone to spearhead it, they turned to Michael Hayden, who spent 21 years in the Marine Corps and has been helping veterans start businesses since 1999. For Veteran Ventures, Hayden has taken the principles of Rady’s Lab to Market course series and adapted them specifically for those with a military background.

“It’s not a static program,” Hayden said. “We take into consideration each series of veterans, and by the third week, we bring in targeted mentors.”

Those mentors come from both the military and civilian worlds—and given the wealth of expertise in San Diego, there’s never a lack of top-notch talent willing to lend a hand.

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