

<http://cascadebusnews.com/veronica-vega-the-mind-behind-the-flavor-at-deschutes-brewery/>  
This story first appeared on the cover of the Oct. 16, 2019 edition of Cascade Business News.



## Veronica Vega — The Mind Behind the Flavor at Deschutes Brewery

BY RONNI WILDE — CBN REPORTER ON OCTOBER 31, 2019 BUSINESS & INDUSTRY, E-HEADLINES

(Veronica Vega | Photos courtesy of Deschutes Brewery)

Bend's craft brew industry has a rising star in Veronica Vega, who has quickly climbed the ranks at Deschutes Brewery, starting as a tour guide and now serving on the senior leadership team as director of product development. As such, she is the company's first female lead brewmaster.

Vega began her career at Deschutes 13 years ago as a tour guide, and has enjoyed a fast climb up the Deschutes Brewery corporate ladder. But, as a mother of two, she strives to strike the balance between work and home life.

Vega, a sparkly-eyed young woman with a polite demeanor, grew up in Ventura County, California and attended college at Humboldt State in northern California. After graduating with a biology degree, she worked as a biological field tech with private lumber companies in the area. She then did seasonal work for the National Park Service monitoring spotted owls, which are a threatened species.

"I had a desire to settle into a community, so I decided to choose my town and make it work," said Vega. "I had friends in Bend, and I came and fell in love with the town."

Vega said that when she looked for work here, she was interested in doing quality assurance for Deschutes Brewery, but there weren't any openings, so she took a job as a tour guide in the tasting room instead. Then a job opened in production, so she applied.

"It was really in telling people about how the beer is brewed here that I got interested in brewing," she said. "I was never a home brewer. But I got the job in production, and I got bit by the brewing bug. I started home brewing." Vega worked in production for four years, then moved into the position of head brewer of the brewery's Bend Pub, a position she held for four years. She then became brewmaster of product development, co-managing the brewing department with the brewmaster of operations. Then about eight months ago, she was promoted to director.

"Veronica is a strong, natural leader here at Deschutes Brewery, and is highly regarded for her technical skills and creativity," said Deschutes President and CEO Michael LaLonde. "Veronica is passionate about beer, our brewery and the craft beer industry, and relentlessly stands up for what she believes is the best for the company and our co-owners."

"It's still very challenging," Vega said. "I have never been bored here." The speed in which consumers want new products keeps her on her toes and requires tenacity, she said. Her current push is in developing "Wowza!" the brewery's new low-cal, hazy pale ale. The product is already available as a draft, and will become available in cans in January 2020. "For that beer, we needed it at 100 calories, but we wanted it to taste good, so we added chicory root, which is a natural sweetener."

According to sales data from the Brewers Association of America, the craft beer industry continues its explosive growth, accounting for 24 percent of the U.S. beer market, a \$114 billion industry. It's not surprising that keeping Deschutes Brewery at the forefront of the trend toward specialty brews is no small task.

A typical day at the brewery for Vega involves lots of meetings, and revolves around whatever product she is currently developing. Her duties include training and educating about products; participating in quality control with the "Sensory Team," which tastes every product that goes out each day and discusses specifics such as shelf life studies and flavor variations; and she attends the senior staff meetings, where all topics are reviewed, ranging from employees and events to marketing strategies and financial information. But her daily to-do list doesn't stop there: Vega also works with the development team on all aspects of how a product is launching; she meets with the brewing team; and she works on the creative, marketing and processing aspects of a launch. "We don't just make beer, we collaborate on how to tell the story," she said.

When she's not at work, Vega is mom to a seven-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old stepdaughter, and she and her husband — who also works at Deschutes Brewery as head of the IT department — own a six-acre hobby ranch complete with goats and lambs. “We are very busy. We juggle who drops off and who picks up, because our kids have many activities. It's messy and very day-to-day as to how we get through it,” she said. Their ranch is located 25 minutes outside of town, and Vega said her commute time is the one quiet part of her day when she can just think.

Despite her full schedule, Vega manages to have recreational hobbies too. She is a former cycle cross racer, and has recently returned to the sport. She is part of the Deschutes Brewery Racing Team, which competes in events throughout the state. She also enjoys mountain biking and Nordic and Alpine skiing.

Vega is passionate about what she does, because she believes that beverages bring people together, and that businesses can be a force for good in the world. “Beverages are a catalyst for conversation. We've done that for 30 years here,” she said. “We benefit the people who work here, and we can positively impact the world by using raw materials and asking that our suppliers incorporate sustainability.”

[deschutesbrewery.com](https://deschutesbrewery.com)