

# DINING & DRINK

SN StarNewsOnline.com/food

## Unique 'Islander' brew makes its debut in the Port City

By Paul Stephen

Paul.Stephen@StarNewsOnline.com

A new brew has come ashore, and the Port City gets the first sip.

Georgia Dunn recently introduced her Islander Ginger Beer to the United States, debuting the beverage in Wilmington-area Harris Teeter stores.



Dunn

who splits residency between the U.S. and the Turks and Caicos Islands, met with the grocer's corporate bosses earlier this year, and the decision to launch at the coast was an easy one.

"They said it tastes like the beach," Dunn noted. "It went on sale just before Memorial Day weekend, kind of a kick-off to the summer."

Ginger beer, as most of us commonly know it, tends to be a slightly zippy soft drink.

While the elixir produced by bottlers like Barritt's and Gosling's are typically amped up with a pour of rum to make a classic "dark and stormy" cocktail, few labels hold true to the drink's historically harder roots. Dunn's beverage packs a punch – at 5 percent alcohol by volume, her brew has moved from the soda shelf to the beer cooler in the grocery store.

"Mine is not your fathers Oldsmobile," Dunn said. "I'm trying to put the beer back in the beverage."

Ginger beer was born in the Caribbean following the rhizomes' introduction to the region from Asia in the 16th century. By the mid 1800s, thousands of breweries across several countries supported a robust thirst for the bubbly refresher.

The sipper, Dunn said, was early America's beverage of choice by necessity as much as anything. Unlike the malted barley-based beers we're familiar with today, ginger



Some Wilmington-area Harris Teeter stores are now carrying Georgia Dunn's Islander Ginger Beer. Photo by Michael S. Harrison

beer's alcohol is fermented from sugar cane. "When the U.S. was settled, we didn't have a huge amount of access to grain," Dunn said. "It wasn't until the war of 1812

that the west and all that prairie land opened up."

Falling from favor amid taxation changes in the Caribbean and Prohibition on the mainland, ginger beer's

popularity – in the hard form, at least – waned by the early 20th century. Dunn's drive to preserve history, however, spurred her research into half-millennia old recipes, the foundation for her modern reinterpretation of the beverage. "Ginger beer is not just a consumer product, it's really about these old family recipes," she said. "I feel that our generation should be asking our loved ones about their favorite recipes and making sure we know how to make them."

Dunn's ancestors would have known the drink well. Tracing her family tree back to some of the Caribbean's earliest families, Dunn's relatives include prominent salt traders. Her Tar Heel lineage is strong as well, with a direct line to Thomas Harriott, an English mathematician who joined Sir Walter Raleigh on a voyage to Roanoke Island in 1585. Married to William Irwin Belk, a descendent of the de-

partment store founder William Henry Belk, Dunn's choice to brew the beer in the Carolinas was natural. She's contracted production of Islander to the respected Thomas Creek Brewery in Greenville, S.C., an outfit responsible for several notable statewide labels.

Islander has landed on the shelves at several area bottle shops, and cooks are taking note as well. Dunn brought an early delivery to chef Keith Rhodes of Catch restaurant and said he found quick inspiration. "Because of all the citrus in it, it pairs really well with seafood," Dunn said.

Look for Islander Ginger Beer at area Harris Teeter stores, The Brewers Kettle, Hey Beer and Bombers Bev Co. It's roughly \$13 for a four-pack and delivers a unique flavor that's just right for the season. More at [www.IslanderGingerBeer.com](http://www.IslanderGingerBeer.com).

Paul Stephen: 910-343-2041  
Twitter: @PaulStephenSN