

# Soda Sense brings commerce, jobs to Seymour

BY RICK COHLER  
CORRESPONDENT

SEYMOUR – Seymour bills itself as the “Home of the Hamburger” and nothing goes better with a burger than a soda.

Well you're in luck, as Seymour is now home to both.

Soda Sense, a local business with national reach, employs 30 people and is giving new life to the former Shopko building along WI Highway 54.

## Getting started

It was an idea sparked by a meeting of minds between now Soda Sense CEO Mike Nelson and friend Brandon Lotto, with the concept itself dating back nearly four years ago.

Lotto said his fondness of his at-home carbonated beverage system inspired him to look for potential CO2 cartridges filling options, instead of always having to buy new ones.

Enter Nelson, as well as Dean Henrickson, Rob Ernest and several other Soda Sense investors.

But it wasn't all smooth-sailing.

Nelson said an early challenge the group ran into was shipping.

“CO2 is regulated by the Department of Transportation (DOT) as a dangerous good,” Nelson said. “We spent months working with the DOT and the United States Post Office to get



Soda Sense is giving new life to the former Shopko building along Highway 54 in Seymour.

some special permits that allow us to ship the product. One of the stipulations is that we can only ship by ground, we cannot airship.”

Nelson said the carbon dioxide used is a byproduct of the production of ethanol.

He said the CO2 is trucked to Soda Sense where it is stored in a 30-ton storage tank outside the building and provides another benefit to Midwest corn farmers.

## The move to Seymour

After operating in Ashwaubenon for about a year, Nelson said a move to the vacant Seymour Shopko building seemed like the natural next step.

He said Seymour Mayor Ryan Kraft was instrumental in bringing Soda Sense to Seymour and the city has been phenomenal to work with.

“We put a deal together, remodeled the building and we moved into the new facility Jan. 1, 2021,” he said.

As much work was put into getting the inside of the building ready to go was also dedicated to the outside, as well.

Nelson said since Shopko had closed the Seymour store in April 2019, the property's landscaping and the building's faded paint also needed attention.

“Image is very important to me; that's one of my top priorities,” Nelson said.

## The concept

As homemade soda connoisseurs themselves, Lotto said the endless headaches of late return charges, return label printing, hunts for drop-off locations and the constant retailer visits hoping for an in-stock canister got them to thinking there had to be a better way – turns out there was.

Nelson said Soda Sense created a way for people to get refills delivered door-to-door.

“In doing that, we've created some intellectual property that we have a patent pending for,” he said. “You have three cylinders and when you put your last cylinder in your machine, you put the other two in the exchange box and put

it in your mailbox. As soon as the post office scans that, it automatically bills you for the refill charge, triggers the order and two or three days later the refills show up on your doorstep.”

Nelson said customers have dubbed it the “endless bubble program” because they never run out of gas.

“You don't have to go back to our website to order,” he said.

Nelson said so far, so good, noting Soda Sense has more than exceeded its three-year business plan.

The on-demand CO2 exchange company can only ship to 48 states because of the ground-only transportation requirement; however, Nelson said they hope to add Alaska and Hawaii at some point.

Nelson said some Soda Sense products are currently being sold through smaller

stores in New York City, San Francisco and Atlanta, and coffee shops in Sheboygan and Seymour are also using the service in their establishments.

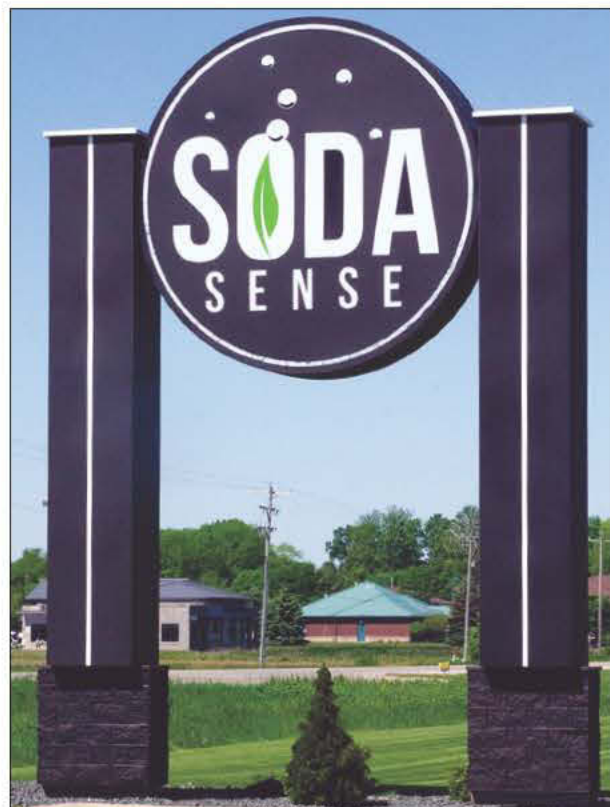
Nelson said they have also just hired a traveling salesperson to help grow that type of business.

“We want to grow partnerships with small, hometown businesses, because it's a true business-to-business relationship,” he said.

Nelson said Soda Sense is also loyal to its employees, paying good wages and benefits and providing a welcoming workplace.

Nelson said he sees a bright future for Soda Sense in making Seymour as well-known as a source in the home-carbonation market as it is for the hamburger.

For more information, visit sodasense.com.



Soda Sense is an on-demand CO2 exchange company based in Seymour. Rick Cohlér Photos



## On watch

Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class and Ashwaubenon native Rigoberto Sandoval stands as a safety observer while a MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter prepares to take off during flight operations aboard Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley. The Gridley is on a scheduled deployment in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Colby A. Mothershead Photo



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