

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- For years, passers-by saw only the dark, desolate alley.

A place where you did not venture. So they kept walking. Quickly.

Sam McNulty imagined something different.

Nightlife. Opportunity. A new path for an old neighborhood.

All it needed was a little light, some energy and a purpose.

That dark alley is no more, thanks to **Market Garden Brewery**.

Adjacent to West Side Market, McNulty's newest bar has transformed a dead spot into one of the city's most vibrant hangouts.

Yes, they come for the beer; Market Garden serves more than a dozen homemade brews. Yes, they come for the energy of the place; it's crowded most days and nights.

But it's the vibe of that once desolate alley -- now a walkway to a happening patio -- that sets Market Garden apart.

The scoop on Sam McNulty

Age: 36.

Occupation: Resident and businessman in Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood.

Known for: **Bier Markt**, 1948 West 25th St., specializing in Belgian beers on tap.

Latest venture: **Market Garden Brewery**, 1947 West 25th St., across from Bier Markt. Beer brewed on site, adjacent to West Side Market, patio and 500-plus capacity.

First job: Delivering The Plain Dealer when he was 11.

High School: Cleveland Heights High School (graduated in 1992).

College: Cleveland State University (B.A., urban planning, 1998).

Hobbies: Traveling the world.

Status: Single.

"Look at that view of West Side Market Tower," McNulty says. "The stalls, that old poultry building that used to house live chickens."

He sips a Forest City Brown Ale, a dark, malty Market Garden concoction that comes with the tagline, "Vintage is new again."

"This is Ohio City," McNulty adds. "This is a real urban neighborhood with a proud past that's coming back to life."

The always-enthusiastic entrepreneur has been instrumental in that process.

McNulty, 36, owns three other bars within a bottle's throw of Market Garden: Bar Cento, Speakeasy and Bier Markt.

He's also a relentless booster of West 25th Street, extolling the virtues of neighborhood establishments. Or housing on the street. Or the park at West 25th and Lorain.

McNulty's enthusiasm is well placed, says Great Lakes Brewing Co. founder Patrick Conway.

"The neighborhood is busier than it's been in a long time, thanks to the opening of places such as Market Garden or Crop," says Conway, referring to the latest additions to West 25th. "There's a renaissance taking place like I haven't seen in the 23 years that I've been here -- and the whole neighborhood is benefiting."

Celebrations pegged to the centennial of the West Side Market in 2012 promise to increase business even more -- though McNulty is quick to point out that it's hustle and bustle more than sales that has him excited.

"My partners would kill me if they heard me say this, but I'm not in this for the money," he says. "This is my passion -- to be part of a walkable urban neighborhood that's making a comeback."



John Petkovic, The Plain DealerMarket

Garden Brewery not only offers 11 homemade beers, it also boasts a stellar view of West Side Market

That might sound like a line he picked up in a textbook about urban planning. After all, that's what McNulty majored in at Cleveland State University.

Acting on it came thousands of miles away from class. It was fueled by his other, bigger, passions: traveling and drinking beer.

"I was backpacking through India when I randomly met this Polish guy," says McNulty. "And it just so happened that he had worked in a Belgian-style bar in Australia."

A light went off in his head.

It was a little blurry and not just because the conversation made his head spin like a globe, he admits.

After all, McNulty had been drinking all day.

But the light kept flickering until he returned to Cleveland -- and until he opened McNulty's Bier Markt, in 2005.

"At first, I thought about opening a bar that served all kinds of international beers," he says. "Then I realized: Belgian beer is my favorite -- and there weren't any in the area, or even Ohio."

Staying ahead of the pack, but not so far that you lose it, has been a trademark of McNulty's style.

"Sam has a unique passion," says Gary Ogrocky, of Dimit Architects, a Lakewood firm that designed Market Garden. "But he's a smart enough entrepreneur to know what people like and appeal to that."

That includes redefining the concept of beer joint -- to make it less masculine and appeal to women, even families or people just looking for a bite to eat during the day.

"Sam was conscious of the West Side Market, and not just its historical value," Ogrocky says. "You have shoppers who might not be beer aficionados, but they might want to stop in for a drink and something to eat."

The alley between the market and Market Garden is vital in making the connection.

The patio offers the open, people-friendly space urban planners always talk about. Then there was the installation of lights, to make the area visible. Even trimming the trees, in the market's parking lot behind the bar, was part of the makeover.

"That's what makes Sam so unique," says Cleveland Councilman Joe Cimperman. "He's like these old ethnic ladies who keep their sidewalk clean. You know if you do it that everyone else will and it will make the neighborhood nicer."

In McNulty's case, the cleanup involved rotted produce, which once littered the alley.

"He makes the area look better and he gives back to the area," says Cimperman. "He buys most of his food from the West Side Market and he employs people from the neighborhood."

The space that houses Market Garden was going to be a state liquor store and check-cashing operation if not for McNulty, adds Cimperman.

"That would've been horrible," he says. "We can thank for Sam moving in and bringing something positive there."

Breathing life into the area couldn't come at the expense of the old vibe, though.

Market Garden, located in a former grocery store and poultry shop, is a prime example of repurposing space.

"Initially, we were going to knock down the poultry building," says Ogrocky. "But we decided to consciously make it look like found space. We even kept the graphics on the building and just put the sign out back over them."

The idea fit in with the trend in urban design to embrace the past to give the present an air of authenticity. But it also fit with McNulty's love of all things old.

"I love Tom Waits," he says, referring to the musician. "His songs sound like something from another time -- something authentic, where everything isn't perfect, but it has this real personality to it."

At the other end of the spectrum is processed pop music -- and what he sees as the architectural equivalent: lifestyle centers such as Crocker Park.

"We're building fake small towns instead of embracing and conserving what we have," he says. "I want something real, without the artificial sweeteners."

It's an attitude that was instilled in him at an early age, says his father Bill McNulty.

"We always stressed recycling and making due with what you had," says Bill McNulty, who lives in St. Petersburg Beach, Fla. "Sam was always very frugal and never liked to waste things."

He also was a builder, even as a child.

"He would sit in his sandbox all by himself, creating things," Bill McNulty says. "He was always quiet and studious and so focused and hard-working."

For good reason, says Sam.



Thomas Ondrey, The Plain DealerSam

McNulty.

"I grew up in a big family, with six siblings, and we never had much money," he says. "So I always had to hustle to get ahead."

McNulty started hustling at 11, delivering The Plain Dealer.

"I delivered the paper 365 days a year," he says. "And kept on doing it until I started school at Cleveland State."

He entered CSU in 1992 with dreams of being an urban planner. His biggest learning experience came with operating an eatery in the student center.

"I knew nothing about operating a restaurant and made every mistake imaginable," he says. "I thought you could prepare everything on the spot -- which is why people ended up having to wait for 45 minutes for a sandwich."

Bill McNulty imagined his son as an architect, not a restaurateur. But that's not why he was worried about him.

"Sam was a bit gullible, and his mother and I thought that people would take advantage of him," he says. "He was a dreamer and more connected to spiritual things."

Sam McNulty grew up in a home where spirituality was always emphasized.

Bill and his wife Ruth are born-again Christians. Prayer and Bible readings were commonplace. Sam was home-schooled for much of childhood. And there was never any alcohol in the house.

"My wife and I were both social workers," says Bill McNulty. "We saw the negative effects drinking can have on people and we always tried to emphasize a moral life to our children."

Sam McNulty came to see the social effects of drinking -- the positive kind.

"In many ways, I see having a beer with a friend as social work," he says. "You sit down on a bar stool with someone who's having a hard time about something -- some good conversation over a really good beer will do wonders."

It also helped Sam McNulty become more sociable.

"I was painfully shy as a child," he says. "I could barely make eye contact with people, until I put my mind to it and try really hard to break out of my shell."

He made his biggest breakout when he was 18 and decided to go to London.

"I took my bike with me and my backpack and went all over the city," he says. "I didn't know anyone -- I set out to explore on my own and force myself to meet new people."

It was the first of many international excursions, and he has a world of experience in his backpack. He's traveled countless times across Europe and Asia. Sometimes, he flies solo and follows his spirit.

"My mom is Lithuanian and was born in a refugee camp in Germany after World War II, and my dad came over here from Ireland," he says. "So I've always been a wanderer -- I'm a bit of a gypsy who grew up with an immigrant work ethic."

Both go a long way in explaining why he remains single.



John Petkovic, The Plain Dealer
Bier Markt is a Belgian beer hall owned by an Irish guy who came up with the idea after running into a Polish guy while backpacking in India. Sound convoluted? It'll all make sense after a glass of Delirium Tremens, one of many high-powered brews at the place. Then again, maybe not.

"A lot of bar owners get into the business because they want to meet girls," he says. "I have a hard time keeping a girlfriend."

And not because they have a problem with him drinking beer, which he does daily, with pride.

"I'm already married, to my bars," he says. "It's frustrated people I've gone out with in the past, but this is what I love."

That doesn't prevent him from taking trips. He's going to Mexico in November -- "to explore and drink beer."

But don't expect him relocating from Cleveland. Or even West 25th, where he lives.

"I can't imagine leaving this city or this street," McNulty says. "This is my home. And this is probably where I'm going to be buried."