

Donnis Todd

Master Distiller, Garrison Brothers Distillery

Some men are born knowing their purpose. Donnis Todd is one of those men.

Born in Marblehead, Ohio, Donnis was raised by a legacy of military service and self-sufficiency. When he was in middle school, his grandfather shared the secrets of distilling with Donnis, and thus began his journey toward destiny.

After serving 10 years in the US Air Force on multiple deployments, Donnis moved to Stonewall, Texas, to raise his son. As it often happens in small towns, Donnis and his good friend Fred Koch heard about some guy trying to make whiskey in Hye. Donnis told Fred, “I only have six months left in the USAF; find us a way in!”

It was in December 2007 that fate took over. Donnis was home on terminal leave and helping Fred—who did find a way in to Garrison Brothers—cook mash and run the still while owner Dan Garrison was out of town with his family. Donnis was in the still house cooking when Dan met him for the first time. Dan asked him who he was and what was he doing. Donnis told him, “I’m making bourbon for you.” Dan explained that he didn’t have any money and wasn’t looking for another employee. Donnis replied, “Well, I’m not leaving so you better figure something out.” And that was that.

Dan did hire Donnis, and, in 2012, Donnis became Texas’ first bourbon master distiller. Over the years, he’s realized his dream from his childhood days distilling with his grandfather. He is the cornerstone voice for Garrison Brothers’ aging inventory, hand-selecting every barrel of bourbon used in the expression of Garrison Brothers bourbon. By personally hand-crafting the first bourbon whiskey ever legally produced in Texas, Donnis has helped shape what Texas bourbon is, one drop at a time.

Donnis still lives in Stonewall with his wife, Deena, his son, Calvin, and daughter, Amber. He is at the distillery almost every day, still cooking, distilling, and keeping a close watch over his beloved barrels. He’s also heading up daily operations with a staff of six and leading the single barrel selection program with retailers and individual consumers. Donnis knew he was destined for this life, and now, he’s working on leaving a legacy.