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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **78<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL WSWA CONVENTION & EXPOSITION CANCELLED, VIRTUAL WSWA BRAND BATTLE TOURNAMENT ANNOUNCED**

*In lieu of the annual Convention & Exposition, WSWA announces a virtual WSWA Brand Battle Tournament for craft, startup and small production wine, spirits and low/no alcohol brands*

**WASHINGTON, D.C., 02/10/2021** – Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) today announced the cancellation of the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual WSWA Convention & Exposition due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic while simultaneously announcing a virtual, expanded version of one of its most popular in-person events, the WSWA Brand Battle Tournament.

“We’re excited to showcase brands and highlight the marketplace expertise of America’s wine and spirits wholesalers in the 2021 Brand Battle,” said WSWA CEO and President Michelle Korsmo. “Keeping the camaraderie, networking and spirit of competition alive with the craft, startup and small production brands that are so important to wholesalers is the driving force behind the creation of the virtual WSWA Brand Battle Tournament.”

Typically held during the WSWA Convention, the annual stand out *Shark Tank*-style event showcases rising brands with unique stories, packaging and flavor profiles. The event usually features 5-7 brands that compete in front of a panel of wholesaler and industry professional judges that provide valuable feedback and unrivaled opportunities for development and distribution.

This year’s expanded, “bracketology -type” event will feature 40-50 brands that will battle in eight specific competition categories – each with a chosen Best in Category winner that will continue onto the final round of competition to determine the overall 2021 Brand Battle Champion. This year’s announced brand categories are:

- Vodka/Gin
- Tequila/Mezcal/Cachaça
- Whiskey/Whisky/Bourbon/Scotch
- Ready-to-Drink/Hard Seltzer
- Rum
- Cordial/Liqueur/After Dinner Drink
- Low-Alcohol/No-Alcohol/Mixer
- Wine

Past competition winners include: [Seaside Grown Bloody Mary Mix](#) (2019), [Boukman Rhum](#) (2019), [Gray Whale Gin](#) (2018) and [Bedlam Vodka](#) (2017). In the inaugural year, 2016, there were no declared winners.

This year's competition will take place virtually every Tuesday, taking on the moniker **Tournament Tuesdays** from June through mid-August, culminating in the final Brand Battle Championship this September. This year's judges will feature WSWA Access Wholesaler Advisors, WSWA Board Members, as well as other titans from the wine and spirits industry. A full list of judges, by category will be announced and posted to the WSWA Brand Battle page.

WSWA Access, WSWA's initiative for craft, startup and small production wines and spirits will feature educational programming throughout the application period to better prepare participants for the competition. The first of these webinars [Labeled for Success: What Goes into a Label](#), will be held on March 10, 2021 at 1 PM EST and will be hosted by Natalia Cardenas, Beverage Development Manager for Breakthru Beverage Group, Master Mixologist and WSWA Iron Mixologist competitor along with a panel of experts who will explore what goes into a thought provoking and compelling label. Hear from wine and spirits branding thought-leaders who have mastered consumer engagement with a combination of imagery and words. The selection committee urges applicants to take advantage of the wide array and valuable WSWA Access content, resources and best practices to better develop their application and improve their chances of success.

"The WSWA Access initiative is dedicated to providing access to tools, information, mentoring and networking opportunities that make small production wine and spirits brands realize their full potential," said WSWA Chairman Danny Wirtz of Breakthru Beverage Group. "The WSWA Brand Battle Tournament is an opportunity for these brands to apply their skills and pitch products to a panel of judges in a very exciting, competitive, and potentially career-defining manner on the industry's mainstage."

Interested brands should [apply online](#) and must complete their application by May 1, 2021.

More information can be found at [www.wswa.org/BrandBattle](http://www.wswa.org/BrandBattle)

### **About Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America**

WSWA is the national trade association representing the distribution tier of the wine and spirits industry, dedicated to advancing the interests and independence of distributors and brokers of wine and spirits. Founded in 1943, WSWA has more than 380 member companies in 50 states and the District of Columbia, and its members distribute more than 80 percent of all wine and spirits sold at wholesale in the United States.

To learn more, please visit [www.wswa.org](http://www.wswa.org) or connect with us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

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