

Regional Roaster Groups Accessing Resources and Support

by Adrienne Blasky | photos courtesy of the Northern Coffee Alliance



Adrienne Blasky of Café Imports is a member of the Roasters Guild Membership & Communications Committee and a founding member of the Northern Coffee Alliance.



The newly formed Northern Coffee Alliance held a "Camp Brew Throwdown" in Minneapolis in October 2015.

How do I connect with other coffee professionals? This is something I pondered when I started to get really nerdy about coffee. I was thirsty for knowledge. I certainly didn't have all the answers (or even a handful of them). I simply wanted to be around people who shared a passion with me. I wasn't sure how to connect with others, or even that anyone else wanted to connect with me.

Fast-forward a couple of years to when Roasters Guild Executive Council member Joe Marrocco asked if I would be interested in serving on the Roasters Guild Membership & Communications Committee. I would be on monthly calls with roasters and be asked to connect with members new and old. "Yes, sign me up!" Our committee is working hard to stay connected



Throwing down at the Northern Coffee Alliance's inaugural event, Camp Brew, in 2015.

with our members, but one thing we are finding more and more is that our community wants to be connected with each other.

During our annual member meeting at the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) Expo in April, one question that came up was, "How do I connect with other roasters in my area?" Sure, some of us have the opportunity to connect at events like the SCAA Expo and the annual Roasters Guild events (yes—there are two now!). Those are a blast, but how do we connect with each other when we go home? How do we connect if we cannot make it to these events?

The Roasters Guild has heard these questions, and we are working to help build connections. We recently began hosting quarterly Trierside Chats. Much like the famous Fireside Chats, the Roasters Guild Executive Council wants to connect

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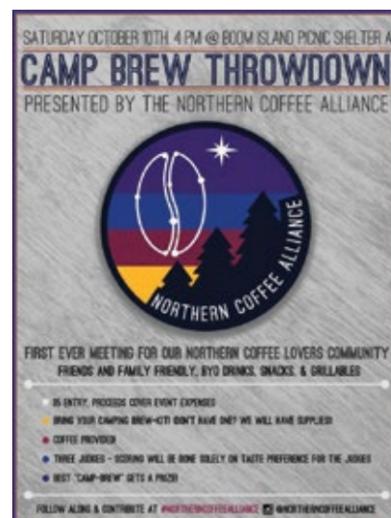
with you in your homes and roasteries. Discussions will be centered on topics that are important to you, Roasters Guild members. In our second Trierside Chat, held in June, our topic was regional roaster groups. If you missed the live stream, do not fear—you can watch the video on the SCAA YouTube Channel ([youtube.com/scaacoffee](https://www.youtube.com/scaacoffee)).

During the June Trierside Chat, SCAA Director of Membership Mansi Chokshi

told us about the development of a member map and regional roaster group registration with the SCAA. The member map is going to be a fantastic resource to see how many Roasters Guild members are in your area. Each member will be a dot on the map, plotting the concentration of our membership. If there is a registered regional roaster group in the area, that also will be noted. Groups can register with the Roasters Guild at roastersguild.org.

Once a group registers, its events will be added to the Events page on the Roasters Guild website. Registered groups also are eligible for monetary support from the SCAA to host educational and networking events. For example, if your group wants to host a networking event, you can apply for funding for a round of drinks, or apply for funds to help purchase coffee for a coffee-focused event.

This is exciting news. Financing for a new group typically comes from the pockets of organizers and members. These new resources will help make regional groups a reality for many Roasters Guild members who weren't sure where to start.



The SCAA and the Roasters Guild are eager to help our members start regional roaster groups. So how do you start one? The June Trierside Chat panel included members from three regional groups: the newly formed Northern Coffee Alliance, which I represented; Bay Area Coffee Roasters, represented by Roasters Guild Executive Council member Dani Goot; and the longest standing of the three groups, the South East Roasters Consortium (SERC), which was represented by Todd Arnette of the Academy of Coffee Excellence at Williamsburg Coffee & Tea. These groups range from less than one year in existence to 11 years of successful events, and they are just a small sample of the existing regional roaster groups.

Here are some of the tips speakers shared for starting a regional roaster group:

- 1 Be prepared to make a financial investment.** It will always require some money to get the word out and put on engaging events.
- 2 Set up membership definitions.** All three groups—Northern Coffee Alliance, Bay Area Coffee Roasters and SERC—are open to all who have a passion. SERC requires that you be “southeast of somewhere.” Your group’s requirements can be as strict or as loose as you want.
- 3 Try to keep events regular.** Maybe that’s once a year, like SERC, or maybe it’s quarterly. Members need to be able to expect an event, and to know when to expect it, to keep the momentum and excitement going.
- 4 Plan events that create a sense of community.** You might want to do classes, perhaps you are a competitive bunch, or maybe you’re just hosting a barbeque. Regional groups are not only a great way to connect on a professional level, but also on a social level.

Registered regional roaster groups are eligible for monetary support from the SCAA to host educational and networking events.

Regional roaster groups provide a way for us to connect outside of major industry events. It’s a more intimate way to share ideas and ask others what they are doing. These groups, whether you have 180 members or five, are a way for us to continue to drive our industry forward.

When I began getting excited about coffee, I didn’t know how to engage with other professionals in my area. I was scared to walk into another shop and ask if people wanted to hang out. All it took to start a regional group was to ask another roaster, “Hey, do you think we could do a citywide hang out?” The Northern Coffee Alliance is still getting off the ground, but I know we have the support and resources to help connect our community.

ADRIENNE BLASKY is a sales associate and customer service manager at Café Imports in Minneapolis. She volunteers on the Roasters Guild Membership & Communications Committee and is one of the lead organizers of the Northern Coffee Alliance. Apart from coffee, Adrienne enjoys spending time hiking through Minnesota’s state parks system.

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