

Hemp-Derived THC Beverage Maker Pharos Brands Names Former PepsiCo and Del Monte Executive Mathew 'Matt' Smith CEO

Former PepsiCo and Del Monte executive takes the helm as the brand grows from 74 to 401 retail doors and Congress weighs three-tier oversight for hemp beverages

BILLINGS , MT, UNITED STATES, August 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Pharos Brands International, LLC, maker of [Pharos Premium Infused Beverages](#), has named Matt Smith President and Chief Executive Officer. Smith, who assumed the role on August 1, spent 15 years at PepsiCo's beverage division in operations, packaging development, and senior brand marketing and new product roles, then led North American marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce and marketing and merchandising for HSN/Cornerstone Brands. For the past 14 years he has advised private equity firms on food and beverage acquisitions above \$100 million.



Matt Smith, President and Chief Executive Officer of Pharos Brands International

Pharos is now carried in 401 retail locations across six states, up from 74 a year ago, an expansion led by SVP of Business Development Jason Mohr, who spent 15 years at Diageo and five at Coca-Cola. Sales grew 153.5 percent over the same period. In Florida, the brand expanded from 20 ABC Fine Wine & Spirits locations to 127.

The company's Mango flavor took Double Gold with a score of 97 at the 2026 Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America Tasting Competition, where its Black Cherry took Gold. All four Pharos flavors medaled at the 2025 America's Best Hemp THC Beverage Awards, with Blood Orange Lime named Best Low-Dose RTD.

Every market Pharos serves is supplied through licensed alcohol distributors: Green Light Distributing in Florida, Crown Beverage across Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee, Keg1 in Missouri, and Capitol Husting in Wisconsin. Products are sold in both on-premise accounts, including bars and restaurants, and off-premise accounts spanning grocery, chain retail, independent liquor stores and convenience.

"Mary and I are in our seventies, and we started this company because we wanted an alternative to alcohol for people our age," said Rhyno Stinchfield, Co-Founder and Board Chair. "We are very happy to bring in someone like Matt for this next phase. He spent fifteen years doing exactly this inside Pepsi's beverage business."

The appointment comes as Congress weighs the category's future. The Senate this week passed a continuing resolution containing a temporary extension for most Section 781 provisions; the House has not yet taken it up. Pharos is not waiting for the outcome. On July 22, Reps. Andy Barr (R-KY) and Angie Craig (D-MN) introduced the [Lawful Hemp Protection Act](#), which would replace federal restrictions scheduled to take effect November 12 with a national framework: oversight by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, alcohol-style three-tier distribution, 21-and-over age verification, and federal labeling standards. Total Wine & More and the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America are among its supporters. Pharos already operates inside much of that structure. The company distributes exclusively through licensed alcohol wholesalers, and its hemp is grown and processed in the United States, both requirements under the proposed framework.

"I tasted it before I met anybody at Pharos. My first thought was that whoever is making this knows what they are doing, and I wanted to meet them," Smith said. "The second thing I noticed was who it was built for. Most of this category is chasing people in their twenties. Pharos is going after seniors and veterans, and that is the part that made me want in. I put my own money in before I was offered the job."



Pharos Premium Infused Beverages in Mango, Black Cherry, Blood Orange Lime and Raspberry Lemonade.



Pharos Brands International co-founders Mary Bernuth and Rhyno Stinchfield.



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*Matt Smith, President & CEO,
Pharos Brands International*

Co-founder Mary Bernuth, who has led Pharos as chief executive, becomes Executive Board Chair. She will direct her attention to Be Wise Be Well, a nonprofit senior education organization she co-founded.

"We made this for people like us," Bernuth said. "Rhyno and I are the customer. We knew that if people our age were going to change a ritual they have had for forty years, it had to taste better than what they were giving up. That is why we built it premium from the first batch. Moving to the chair role lets me spend my time on senior education,

which is the part I care most about."

Earlier in his career, Smith held Engineering/Operations roles at Colgate-Palmolive. He served as President and CEO of Watermarke Group, a business consulting and private equity advisory firm in Naples, Florida, and serves as President and Regional Developer for Patrice & Associates, the largest hospitality and executive recruiting firm in the U.S. He holds an MBA in Marketing and International Business from New York University's Stern School of Business and London Business School, and a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from Lehigh University.

About Pharos Brands International

Pharos Brands International, LLC produces premium [hemp-derived THC beverages](#) for adults 21 and over, created for a customer the category has largely overlooked: adults 55 and up. Co-founded by Rhyno Stinchfield and Mary Bernuth and headquartered in Billings, Montana, the company operates under the tagline "Inspiring a New Era of Mindful Consumption." Products are sold only where permitted by applicable state law. Learn more at [Pharosbrands.com](#).

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