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## MICROBREW

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fresher taste than beer that sits around on a truck or in a cooler for weeks. Most of our beer is served right upstairs, but when it's summer — especially Oregon Country Fair or Grateful Dead concert time — it goes really fast. People come in, fill up their old mayonnaise jars and head out."

Bob Smith, brew master at Mad River Brewing in Blue Lake, Calif., said the idea of small-scale brewing really isn't new.

"In the past, through the late 1800s and early 1900s, every town had a brewery," Smith said. "A decent-sized city may have had up to five small breweries. They didn't have a wide distribution and didn't produce huge volume, but there was distinction in the beers and there was a certain loyalty to the local brewery.

"When Prohibition came along, those were history because none could survive the economic hardship. The big brewers that are still in existence survived those times by creating other malt-based products, like malted milk. By branching out, they were able to survive the tough times and come on strong when Prohibition was repealed."

Smith said the big brewers are now trying to grab a piece of the growing micro market by mimicking the styles with unique names such as "Pete's Wicked Ale" and "Sam's." He said some small-operation brewers are afraid the big companies, such as Coors and Budweiser, will fool the market into buying the mock-micros and lower the standards.

"There's the 'McBrew' worry amongst us true microbrewers that some giant franchise will come and try to put a brew pub on every corner, kind of like the specialty espresso bar trend," Smith said.

"Those of us who have put our lives at stake to put out a quality product have a bit of a fear the big guys will come along with oodles of money and take over the market. I don't think the American public is stupid enough to let money buy us out. Those beers can't hold a candle to true micros."

Local beer aficionados were able to decide for themselves at this year's Northwest Micro Brew Expo at the Lane County Fairgrounds. More than 25 West Coast brewers brought a spectrum of specialty beers for the tasters to try. Flavors ranged from Marionberry ale with a rich, deep color and purplish head to a dark, smoky-flavored porter.

And the expo attendees were as varied as the beers being served.

"I just had a microbrew and then a Beck's bottled," said expo participant Susan Thelen, "and this is a lot different. This is alive. It grows right out of the glass."

"Beer isn't just some pale lager in a can anymore. People want more," he said.

Eugene currently has four microbreweries and two more are under construction. The four existing pubs are Eugene City Brewery at 844 Olive St., Steelhead Brewery and Cafe at 199 East 5th Ave., the East 19th Street Cafe at 1485 East 19th St. and McMenamin's High Street Brewery at 1243 High St.

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