

Brewery

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“By the end of the day, there was this beautiful frame standing here.”
The interior of the building is rustic yet industrial, says Grassel, meant to reflect the monastic values of quality and simplicity. A space to reflect nature and encourage contemplation.

The walls are the same white as the monastery. The concrete floor is smooth and plain. The wooden bar, tables, and benches are simple but beautiful and sturdy.

Historical photos from the monastery archives hang on one wall. On another, a wooden relief carving of St. Michael.

The entire room still smells of the fir beams and the windows frame recently-harvested hop bines.

Brothers Brewing

Before he was Benedictine’s Head Brewer, Father Martin Grassel worked elsewhere in the Abbey. When he first came to Mount Angel as a seminarian in 1995 he worked at the bookstore, then acted as the abbot’s secretary, then as a deacon.

He then went to Rome for two years to get a degree in theology so he could teach. Though he didn’t know it at the time, his time in Italy would come to have a direct impact on his style as a brewer.

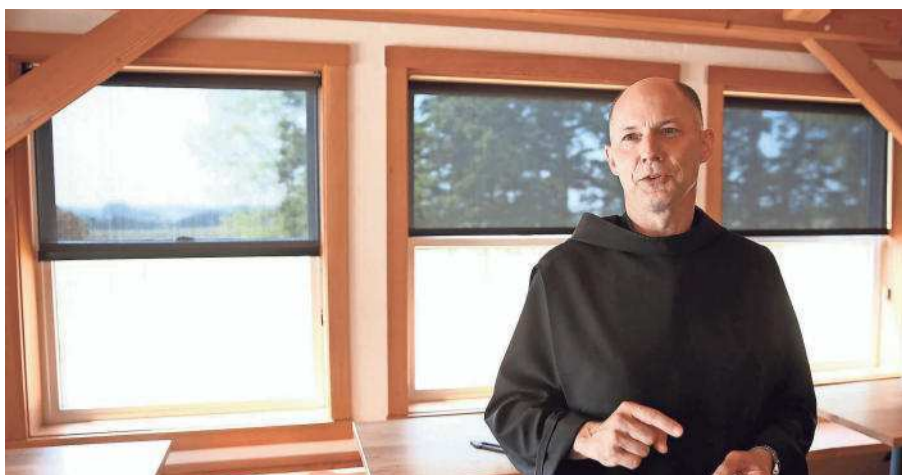
There, he recalls, “the food is so wonderful because it’s so simple. You go get a piece of pizza, a Margherita pizza, and it’s so flavorful ... the sauce, the cheese, the buffalo mozzarella.”

He views the tendency of American breweries to load beers up with fruit, chilies, and other additions as a gimmick.

Instead of rushing to offer a dozen different variations, his plan at Benedictine is that he and Assistant Brewer Father Jacob Stronach, “will master basic beers and do them with quality, the traditional styles ... to do things with simplicity, but with finesse.”

“The American way is to make it to be bigger than the next guy’s, it doesn’t have to be good, it just has to be big. I don’t want that for us. I want the mastery, the goodness that comes from simplicity.”

Benedictine Brewery will use of hops grown on Mount Angel Abbey grounds and water drawn from its well to brew Belgian-style beers, some with what he calls, “the Northwest hop twist.” To



Father Martin Grassel speaks at the Benedictine Brewery in Mt. Angel on Sept. 5. The brewery opened Sept. 22. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

start they will offer a modest selection including Black Habit, St. Benedict Farmhouse Ale, Tyrant Cascadian Dark Ale, and a lighter brew, St. Michael’s Helles Lager.

They will craft these brews in stages, brewing one day and cleaning the next, fitting the work of brewing into their monastic schedule of prayer and their other obligations.

“We like to fit our work between the gaps, but you can’t brew a batch of beer in three hours.”

This means that Benedictine will brew at a slightly different rhythm from other small breweries, but Grassel views that as essential.

“That’s part of the authenticity of the operation. We are monks brewing beer in Oregon, not monks hiring people to brew beer. Why would people come to a monastic brewery if it’s a charade? If the beer is not made by monks it’s not real, it’s like Disneyland. We want to be real.”

With its launch, the Mount Angel brewery joins a tradition of monastic brewing that stretches back centuries and across oceans.

The beers reflected by this tradition include Chimay, from the monks of Scourmont Abbey in Hainaut, Belgium and La Trappe from the Koningshoeven Brewery of Koningshoeven Abbey in the Netherlands.

The Benedictine Brewery will represent only the third brewery operated by monks in the United States. Beers from Spencer Brewery in Spencer, MA, are brewed by Trappist monks at St. Joseph’s Abbey. Benedictine monks from the Desert Benedictine Monastery in Albuquerque, NM founded Abbey Brewing Company.

Like these other monastic breweries, the Benedictine Brewery will be a for-

profit enterprise on the Abbey grounds.

Welcoming the Guest

For Benedictines, hospitality is a feature of monastic life.

“It’s right in the holy rule, the rule of Benedict,” Grassel said, “welcome everyone as Christ. You welcome them, you serve them, you respect them...that’s the principle.”

The monks hope that by including a taproom at the brewery and by choosing not to distribute their beers offsite, the brewery will act as an invitation to the community of Mount Angel to visit and engage with the monastery.

“Supporting them, meeting them, and having a new level of rapport is important to us.”

He recognizes that, for many, offering something besides beer is key in that interaction.

“We want to welcome people and food is an important part of that, but we don’t want to be a restaurant...we just want to make beer.”

Though the Saint Michael Taproom won’t be a full-service restaurant, the monks plan to offer a short menu. The brewery’s design, which features a garage-style door, includes a space that could accommodate a food truck and they’re working with food producers in Mount Angel, including the Glockenspiel and the Mount Angel Sausage Company on a simple menu.

“We want the local community to prosper,” said Grassel, “it doesn’t even have a grocery store. It should.”

Emily Teel is the Food & Drink Editor at the Statesman Journal. Contact her at eteel@statesmanjournal.com, Facebook, or Twitter. See what she’s cooking and where she’s eating this week on Instagram: [@emily_teel](https://www.instagram.com/emily_teel)

Relay

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ording to Chad Sperry, the race’s director. The others were on their own.

Solo competitor Ryan MacKenzie, of Keizer, wanted to participate last year, but had been celebrating his daughter’s birth. This year, MacKenzie had his wife and daughter waiting for him at each transition point.

“I love to kayak, I love to bike and I love to run,” he said. “So this is a great combination of all of them.”

There were a few adjustments made to the course for this year’s competitors, according to Sperry.

“We made bike course a little bit easier, more friendly,” he said, as last year’s course was more challenging and greeted participants with gusty head winds.

“So instead of going up to Silverton and around, we’re going a much more direct route into Silver Falls.”

The first stretch ran from the pedestrian bridge to Wallace Marine Park, where kayaks then were pushed into the Willamette River for a second leg. Individuals paddled in the rain for 6.2 miles heading toward Spong’s Landing Park, a county park just north of Salem.

From there, cyclists pedaled 40.3 miles to Silver Falls State Park, winding through farmland. Cyclists battled wind gusts, some rainfall and hills over the course of the ride.

After the bikes, competitors on foot worked the last leg, 5.8 miles through the park.

“Silver Falls is so beautiful to finish up there,” Sperry said. “We love the opportunity to work with Oregon State Parks, it’s just a privilege.”

Contact Virginia Barreda at 503-399-6657 or vbarreda@statesmanjournal.com



A family member of a participant helps her get into the kayak to begin the second leg of the race on the Willamette Valley River. VIRGINIA BARREDA / STATESMAN JOURNAL

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Address: P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309
Phone: 503-399-6773
Fax: 503-399-6706
Email: sanews@salem.gannett.com
Web site: www.SilvertonAppeal.com

Staff

News Director
Don Currie
503-399-6655
dcurrie@statesmanjournal.com

Advertising
Terri McArthur
503-399-6630
tmcarthur@salem.gannett.com

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