

# Brewing With Brett *The Blue House Brewer is Getting Comfortable in His New Digs*

By Scott Laird

When the Blue House Mediterranean Cafe started serving Brett Costley's home-brewed beers at their old location five miles south of Vernonia, those of us who appreciate a good microbrew were a little more than pleasantly surprised by the quality of beer Costley produced for our consumption. And it gave many of us just one more reason to head out to the Blue House-- fresh, healthy, delicious food-- plus great beer?! Let's go!

When the Blue House Cafe and Brewery moved to downtown Vernonia this past spring, within walking distance of many of our homes or work, it got even better. Now Costley is starting to get comfortable with his new two-barrel brewing system that Blue House owner Sam Semerjian has put together, and things are improving even more.

After a few months of experimenting with his tried and true recipes, Costley is starting to work the bugs out of the new system, and figuring out what adjustments he needs to make to brew batches of beer five to six times the size of what he was brewing before. The new sixty-two gallon system is getting put to full use too, as the Blue House is pouring it as fast as Costley can brew it and keg it.

I recently had the pleasure of spending a few hours watching Costley start a batch of Dry Stout, and chatted with him about the process of making his now locally famous Brett's Brews.

Beer brewing is a fairly complicated process, especially if you are just reading about it and trying to



**Blue House brewer, Brett Costley works on a batch of Stout.**

make sense of the steps and unfamiliar terms. Wort. Mash. Sparge-- what does it all mean? But when you are there and observing, it all starts to come together. It does help to have someone with over fifteen years of brewing experience explaining the process to you. Mix the grains in some hot water; strain out the grains and boil what's left; move to a fermentation tank and add yeast; put it in a keg a few weeks later and drink. Not really so complicated. Of course, there are a few more steps than that and numerous variations, recipes and small adjustments for each batch and style. But seeing it happen makes it all much more clear.

Costley brews fairly straightforward and simple recipes. Stouts and Porters. Golden and Pale Ales. Fruit-flavored Wheats in the summer. An occasional Red, and a Rye now and then. With four taps available at the Blue House, it's a continual rotation as the seasons change. "If I can get enough of a batch kegged up, I might do some small batches at home and some experiments to see if people like them," said Costley, discussing the possibility of trying some new recipes or variations. "I don't want to try sixty gallons of a Chocolate Stout, since I've never brewed with chocolate before, and then find out I did something wrong."

Bigger batches mean more beer at one time and brewing less often. "The equipment works well," said Costley. "I like it on the whole, because it's easier than my other equipment because there's less manual labor involved. And I can make six times as much beer at one time with about ninety percent of the labor as before. So that's pretty good."

It also means getting the batch just right, or you end up with a lot of beer that isn't very popular. With the new equipment and adjustments to his recipes, Costley

has had a few batches that haven't turned out exactly as planned. But with some feedback from customers and help from Sam, Costley is figuring out the details and getting everything dialed in. "There's definitely been some adjustments," said Costley. "I'm not completely happy with where our beer is right now. I think it's drinkable. And it's still pretty cool that we have something that's locally made." So Costley is working hard to continually improve the process and his end product.

Brewing is a fine art, but not an exact science. Measurements are often guesses or by the look and feel of things that day. Add an extra scoop of grain here; a little less water this time and maybe not as hot; which type yeast did you use, where did it come from and how old is it? A hops shortage this past year has left brewers all over scrambling to find substitutions and make adjustments to their recipes.

As he's brewing, Costley explains the importance of water temperature at various times in the process, the difference in



malted grains-- dark versus regular, the extraction of sugars from the grains and how different strains of yeast will interact with those sugars in the fermenter, and how he plans to use some of his own homegrown hops for aroma and flavor. This is where it all gets more complicated, and you start to see where his years of

experience start to pay off.

Having our own locally brewed beer has been a real treat for Vernonia beer lovers. And as Brett Costley gets more comfortable with his new brewing system, we can expect more of what we have come to enjoy at the Blue House Cafe in Vernonia-- delicious food and great beer.

## Meet Frank Grace, Vernonia's New Police Chief *continued from front page*

out input from the stakeholders and partners involved, and that could be just Police Department personnel, that could be police and city personnel, it could be those two and community members, depending on the changes we're going to make and who is impacted by it.

One change the community will see in October is more coverage. The staff has put together a new schedule that is actually going to provide better coverage for the city, including days when you haven't been seeing officers. And the credit for that goes to the officers who put it together.

**Vernonia's Voice: This community has experienced two major weather-related events the past two winters. What is your past experience in Emergency Preparedness?**

**Frank Grace:** I'll be honest, the only experience I have is academic. I've never had the experience of hands-on. To my benefit, I do have my academic training, but the real test comes when it happens. I think I'm very fortunate to have an office full of personnel, and the city is very fortunate to have others, the Fire Department, the Public Works Department, and the county-wide support we have-- all people who have dealt with these issues in the past. Now, not every event is going to be the same, but I think there's a good game plan, and people who have experienced it. So my experience is very limited and I'm looking to learn as much as I can. When you think about this area, you obviously see the concern for flooding, but we're really in a situation for fire danger as well. And we have fault lines to be concerned with, and earthquakes. So this area offers some real challenges in terms of Emergen-

cy Management.

**Vernonia's Voice: Do you have specific personal or community goals that you hope to accomplish here in Vernonia?**

**Frank Grace:** One of the things I'm looking to develop, and I haven't really decided what we'll call it, maybe we'll call it a Police/Community Forum. I'm really a believer in partnerships and having the work we do transparent. I think sometimes people have the wrong impression about what police work is all about. We're not independent players, we have a set of rules to play by. Police work is a science, and we have to meet all the standards before you can make an arrest. We have a set of laws that are universal that cover personal rights and freedoms, we can't just arrest people and take them to jail. Police officers are the first line of defense for municipalities against lawsuits. They have to be doing their job correctly. So I want to establish a forum that has community members. I want people to be on the forum who have no knowledge of police work. You don't have to be a fan of the police to be on the forum. I think it's a good avenue to stop some of the rumors and give the community some insight. I want to have a group who are committed to coming in and asking questions and letting us give you some answers.

The other thing I would like to achieve is a better rapport with the community, and have people approach the police. I would really like to find ways to involve more of our young citizens and our youth, to find ways to get them involved in the community and with the police and see if we can't make this city even more livable than it already is.



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