

Put down that PBR!

Local brewer defies trendy tastes. BY DOUGLAS FUCHS

*But the greatest love, the love of all loves,
Even greater than that of a mother ...
Is the tender, passionate, undying love,
Of one beer-drunk slob for another.
— Irish Love Ballad*

Remember beer? The carbonated beverage used to be rather trendy. People stood in line to get into newly constructed brew pubs, eager to taste the newest concoctions — India Pale Ales, Milk Stouts and bizarre, not-very-popular brews such as Organic Hemp Pepper Licorice Smoked Amber Lager.

What happened? Many theories abound, but most savvy drunks believe that the revival of disco madness in the mid-'90s also rejuvenated cheap, sugary cocktails — alchemical mixtures that help young people wiggle their backsides to simple drum beats while admiring the putrid smells and gleaming eyes of the opposite sex.

But that bummer didn't last long, thank gawd. The new trend these days is to wait until dusk, purchase a half-case of PBR, find a dimly lit parking lot, such as behind a dentist's office, smoke "healthy" cigarettes and scream fervent appreciation into the waning night while pissing on the expensive landscaped shrubbery.

Always avoid dentists' parking lots at night. Always.

As all real beer fans know, brew pubs are still open in town, although fewer in number due to attrition. Oregon Fields closed. Spencer's Brewery closed. Wild Duck Brewery closed. Eugene City Brewery closed. But the grandfather of all Eugene/Springfield brew pubs, the High Street Brewery, is still fermenting away, producing keg after keg of really good beer.

The first brewery to open in Eugene since Prohibition, High Street Brewery is an early breed of the McMenamins chain, a partnership of two brothers who started opening brew pubs in the early 1980s in order to raise funds for a winery. Their "Hippy Décor English-Style Pub

Houses" took off in Oregon, with McMenamins brew pubs now open in every nook and cranny in the Pacific Northwest.

Located at 1243 High St. and housed in an old 1900s house, High Street Brewery pumps out quality beer in the basement, just like the old days, with hand-crafted brewing equipment that only works for brewers who are really enthusiastic about brewing beer.

Luckily, High Street Head Brewer Lane Fricke loves to brew beer in basements and has been producing great beer at High Street Brewery for almost five years. "Everything I make pretty much flies out the door," he said.

One of the most popular brews at High Street is Umpteen IPA, a well-balanced, hoppy beer that imparts the combined flavors of floral hops and malt sweetness typical in Pacific Northwest

India Pale Ales. "My IPA is perennial; people go crazy over the beer," Fricke said. "Umpteen IPA is a reference to the fact that I have to make it so often."

He's also required to brew and serve the popular core beers including Terminator Stout, Hammerhead, Ruby, and Black Rabbit Porter, all of which are available in any McMenamins pub. Brewers can also create their own recipes, which allows for some delicious signature beers. "Because we don't have the capacity to brew lagers, I try to be as creative as possible when brewing ales," Fricke said.

He brews a number of his own creations, including Dreamstate ESB, a superb Extra Special Bitter traditionally brewed to be smooth, crisp and lightly hopped; and Heavy Hand Strong Ale, a huge strong ale rich in malt, hops and alcohol heat.

Fricke started out as a home brewer to save money. Anyone can brew five gallons of homebrew for a lot less than it costs to purchase five gallons of beer in any store. As he began to brew a variety of styles at home, his beer became popular with his friends and he developed a reputation as a skilled home brewer.

He moved to Eugene and started hanging out with the professional and home brewers in the area. After numerous applications and a lot of home brew, Fricke got the job at High Street.

The interior at the pub features a small bar, a few long tables and the coveted booths. People with pints of beer lurk in the hallways with shifty eyes, ready to pounce on a booth as soon as it becomes available. Outdoor seating in the back is just as popular, with enough space to accommodate most crowds. Hidden behind the house pub, the outdoor beer garden offers a great place to drink superb beer, people watch and blow off essential responsibilities.

And so the trend continues, to a degree, with Fricke down in the basement dodging kegs and producing some of the area's best brews. "People are drinking the beer here; it's a cool place," he said. ©



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