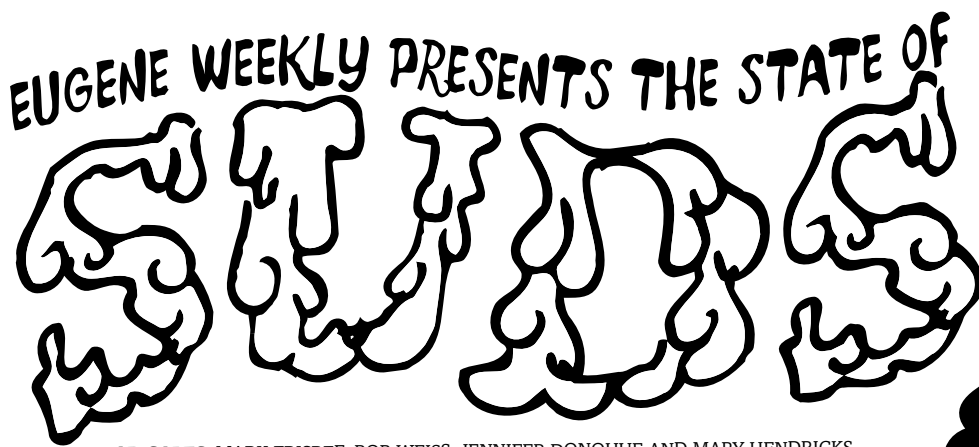




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Once again the crazy kids in the advertising department here at *Eugene Weekly* are not only keeping the alternative weekly with the nation's seventh highest penetration rate chock full of ads but taking their annual opportunity to do some "creative" writing — and we use the term "creative" very loosely, friends, very loosely indeed. Of course there is always the exception to the rule, and as in years past we were able to coax a few local freelance writers into drinking some beer and pumping out a few thousand words for you to enjoy.

Special thanks go out to Lance "The Wine Guy" Sparks and Elliot Martinez, the pride of the Whiteaker, for their editorial contributions. Also to Stacey McKay and the folks at Western Beverage for their continued support, to Chip and Dave at the Bier Stein and all the breweries and brewmasters for being such gracious and generous hosts.

EUGENE: BEER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD?

WORDS BY ELLIOT MARTÍNEZ | PHOTO BY JON CHRISTOPHER MEYERS

Not to worry, Portland. Eugene might not be the beer capital of the world — yet. But developing quietly in the weeds of the Willamette Valley, Eugene's craft beer scene is blooming and booming. Probably our best-kept secret, Eugene's world-class brewers are working harder than ever to bring us all top-notch craft beer.

But what makes Eugene beer so outstanding? Any seasoned brewer will tell you that good beer can only be attained through meticulous sanitation of equipment and use of superior ingredients. "We don't make beer. We feed yeast. You've got to feed them what they want ... and feed them well. That's what makes good beer," says Jeff Althouse, owner of Willamette Brewery. From the beginning, the good folks at Willamette Brewery have focused all their energies on attaining two goals — producing the absolute highest quality beer and providing the best possible customer service: "If you're going to make exceptional quality craft beer, you absolutely must use exceptional quality ingredients."

Water being the main ingredient in beer production, who could ask for a better supply of the stuff than what the McKenzie River delivers? It's some of the purest and tastiest water on the planet. And when it comes to the more famous ingredients (i.e., hops and grains), Eugene brewers almost always use organic products — even if it isn't advertised on the bottle.

Eugene couldn't be the beer capital of the world if its citizens didn't know how to party. Thankfully, they do, and our brewers are here to help us get down with our bad selves. Last year's Eugene Celebration wouldn't have been nearly as enjoyable without sponsors such as Rogue, Steelhead, Ninkasi and Willamette Brewery. The KLCC Brew Fest and the nationally recognized Sasquatch Brew Fest are both phenomenally successful, bringing beers from all over the West to Eugene and bringing Eugeneans out in droves to enjoy them all.

Hop Madness '08 at the Eugene City Brewery on August 30th will bring home brewers from all over the country to celebrate hops' role in beer making. "This year, we are very excited to bring endless summer events to both Eugene and Portland," says Jamie Floyd, co-owner of Ninkasi Brewery. "We've got all kinds of fun, cultural stuff happening this year. We're doing the Last Friday ArtWalk, gallery openings, concerts, brew fests, not to mention the Brewers Breakfast at Kells in Portland during the Oregon Brewer's Festival." Ninkasi proudly sponsors the Whiteaker Block Party each year in August, as well as happening musical acts such as Medium Troy and Man Over Board. It's clear our breweries care about fostering community just as much as brewing good beer.

*'We don't make beer.
We feed yeast. You've
got to feed them what
they want ... and feed
them well. That's what
makes good beer.'*

— JEFF ALTHOUSE
OWNER OF WILLAMETTE BREWERY



And it wouldn't be a truly legit Eugene beer scene if you couldn't bike commute to all five breweries. That's right — with Willamette Brewery only four miles from the High Street McMenumins, even the sluggish pub-crawler can span the two-mile radius in a day. "It's great," says Lane Fricke, brew master at McMenumins High Street Brewery & Café. "I was able to *walk* our kegs over to the Sasquatch Brew Fest just using a hand truck. In what other city could you do that?" Summer in Eugene is a great time for a bike and brew. Be sure to stop in at High Street and get yourself a pint of their new summer seasonal, Copper Moon, pouring now through September. It's a refreshing copper-colored pale ale made using all organic grains.

But what really makes the Eugene craft beer scene world-class and unique to Eugene is the non-competitive attitude exemplified by our brewers' ability to promote one another. Go into the Eugene City Brewery and take note of the tap handles. Among the traditionally ornate Rogue tap handles, you will find Ninkasi Total Domination IPA and Willamette Brewery Espresso Stout. "It's a community of brewers. That's what drives the market," Jack Joyce, owner of Rogue Breweries, says. "It's a local phenomenon. I don't think it could happen anywhere else but Eugene."

And it's true. There is certainly camaraderie between the brewers in the area. Fricke at High Street says, "We all work in different environments. We share techniques. We talk." Retailers in the area are well aware of the relationship brewers have in Eugene. Retailers and consumers alike have become very knowledgeable about beer, and no amount of advertising is worth that. Althouse at Willamette agrees. "We are all supportive of each other which, in turn, promotes the entire region, not just one brewery. It's a cozier feel and consumers can feel it. It feels like Eugene — feels like family. We appreciate the people of Eugene for recognizing what local beer is and what good beer is. I can't think of any other town I'd rather be brewing in."

I say it's time to let the secret out of the bag and give these world-class craft beer brewers the credit and recognition they deserve. It's time to let the world know we like beer — good beer — our beer. My fellow Oregonians, I hereby declare Eugene to be the beer capitol of the world, and I hold my pint glass high when I say it. And if anyone from Portland or Bamberg, Germany, disagrees, I say let's discuss it over two pitchers, yours and ours, and let the beer speak for itself. Let's face it, Eugene: We'll be the beer capital of the world a hell of a lot sooner than we'll be the art capital of the West Coast. Kudos, Portland. ■