

NEW BEER ON THE BLOCK

Hop Valley Brewery shakes up Springfield By Katie Kalk

It's hard for most Oregonians, especially the natives, to imagine living in a place that isn't mad about microbrews. IPAs, reds, pale ales, porters — here in the Northwest your average drinker is fully inundated, in head-over-heels in love with beer by age 21 or 22. Summers are marked by sunny weather, Hefeweizens and too many brew fests to count. And blustery, rainy winters become an opportunity to bundle up and sip a nice, heavy stout.

The beer bug hit me as soon as I was old enough to drink. Going to college on the East Coast, I was shocked to discover that most of my new friends didn't drink beer; what's more, they didn't even *like* it. Gin and tonic, rum and Coke, vodka cran — while these drinks are acceptable dance club fare, friends were ordering them at dinner, with appetizers, during *happy hour*. Not a pint of brew in sight. As any local will tell you, this type of behavior just doesn't fly in Oregon. It might even be called sacrilege. And for some Oregonians, beer isn't just a religion: It's a craft, a love affair and a livelihood.

For Eugene native Trevor Howard, brewmaster at the recently opened Hop Valley Brewing Company in Springfield, beer is his business. Recently, I sat down to chat with Howard and sample some of his creations.

"The dream was always to open my own brewpub," he says. "You have more of a relationship with the beer. You're making smaller batches, and you can do more experimenting. I also like to have a beer at the bar and talk to the people who are drinking it. You have a closer relationship with your customers that way."

After years of home brewing, studying fermentation science at OSU, brewing for Rogue and Pelican and winning more than 40 awards for his brews (including a medal at Denver's Great American Beer Festival), that dream has finally been realized. Along with three partners/co-owners — his father, Ron Howard; Jonas Kungys; and Chuck Hare — Howard opened the doors of Hop Valley Brewing in February.

"All the pieces finally started coming together," he says.

Hop Valley took over the building that used to house Spencer's Butte Brewpub near the Gateway Mall. It boasts a beautiful interior, a full brew house with a 15-barrel system, four fermenters and five conditioning tanks, a fairly extensive menu with some killer appetizers, burgers and sandwiches (try the ahi, says

Kungys) and eight beers on tap. A ninth beer, Hop Valley's new seasonal Pollination Honey Ale, debuted on Father's Day.

"For a small brew pub, that's pretty good," Howard says. "We don't specialize in really strong beer or really light beers; we try and do a variety so everyone will have something good to drink."

After sampling each of the beers, I was impressed with the quality. Hop Valley showcases Howard's personal creations — a spectrum of flavors, textures, colors, consistencies and finishes.

The Alphaholic IPA, Hop Valley's top seller and Howard's personal favorite, is hoppy but balanced, not too bitter and crisp to finish. An especially delicious and growler-fill worthy brew is the Vanilla Porter: rich, smooth and infused with flavor from freshly cooked vanilla beans added during the finishing process. The beer menu is filled out with two reds, the Natty and the Stepchild, the classic American lager 541, the Impeller Pale Ale, a Hefeweizen and a blonde. The beer is the end result of a highly creative and intuitive process.

"There's hundreds of different malts out there, almost that many hops and just about as many yeasts," Howard says. "Every brew house chooses their own yeast based on the characteristics they want to end up in their beer. Yeast plays as big a part as the hops and the barley and the water do. All of those components are what makes the beer its own, makes it all come together."

The Double D Blonde, named after Howard's sister-in-law, was something of a happy accident.

"The blonde didn't start out as a blonde," he says. "It was supposed to be a Hefe. It ended up being really light and clear and tasty, so we brewed more of it, and called it the blonde. Then I had to figure out how to make the Hefe."

Drinking Howard's beer in the belly of the beast is worth the trip to Springfield, but Hop Valley has already opened about 40 accounts with taverns, bars, pubs and restaurants throughout Eugene and Springfield. Their beer is available at Starlight, John Henry's, Cornucopia, The Cooler, Taylor's, Max's and occasionally at the Beer Stein, among others. Kegs can be purchased directly from the brew house.

You may have already caught the Hop Valley folks at Sasquatch Brewfest, and they'll be at the Great American



Jonas Kungys and Trevor Howard

ADAM HURLBURT

Beer Festival in Denver in late September. Next year, Hop Valley plans to participate in as many local brew fests as possible. If the early success of their beer is any measure, they'll be around for a long time.

As far as the Springfield location, Howard and co-owner/partner Kungys couldn't be happier.

"Everything was here," says Kungys.

Howard adds, "We have the hospital, the hotels and Symantec, and a lot of service industry businesses around here, so the clientele is really mixed, which is good."

"It's amazing how many of these businesses used to be in downtown Eugene," Kungys says. "The hospital, Symantec — our customers are people that used to live in downtown Eugene. And the hotels. If there's a track convention, a bunch of athletes come in. The next week, it could be a loggers convention. You never know who's coming in, which is great."

After coming back home from school on the East Coast, I no longer take Oregon's microbrew culture and identity for granted — it's a fun, unique part of the place I grew up in. For Howard, it's all about the beer.

"I really like beer a lot," he says, "and making it is really fun. Just to go from a few raw materials, and to turn it into something that tastes so good and will make you feel really good — it's just a really cool thing." ■

Hop Valley Brewing Company, 980 Kruse Way, Springfield. 744-3330. www.hopvalleybrewing.com

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