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TASTE OF THE EURO-NORTHWEST

ColdFire Brewing brings European flair to Eugene's brewing community BY AMY SCHNEIDER

Brothers Stephen and Dan Hughes want their brewery to honor community members who sacrifice a lot and don't get much recognition — namely, teachers and medical workers.

"Healthcare workers and teachers are probably two of the most unrecognized professions I can think of," says Dan Hughes, who opened ColdFire Brewing Company with his brother in January.

"There are a lot of unsung heroes out there, and we definitely wanted to recognize that those people are an important part of our community," Stephen Hughes adds.

That's why teachers and healthcare workers get a discount day each week at ColdFire.

ColdFire Brewing is the culmination of more than 15 years of home brewing, a backpacking trip around Europe and a community effort that started with two brothers. Located close to Skinner Butte Park right off the bike path, ColdFire has set up shop in an area of town that isn't yet saturated with breweries.

"We weren't really interested in being in the Whiteaker district, because the industry is well represented there, so we thought we'd try to be somewhere in an underserved section of the city," Dan Hughes says.

The brothers first thought of south Eugene, but then they caught wind of availability at 263 Mill Street and it seemed like a natural fit.

Three glistening brew tanks line the wall of ColdFire, and the brewers are about to buy a fourth. Starting next year, Dan and Stephen Hughes plan to expand into the neighboring building, which will give them more space for seating and additional brew tanks.

"It's been frustrating in a good way — what you might call a good problem to have — in that the beer styles we've been making sell so well that we just sell out," Dan Hughes says.

Take their German pilsner, for example, which takes six and a half weeks to brew. It sold out in two and a half weeks.

Still, there's plenty of beer to be had at ColdFire, and one of the compliments the brothers say they hear most is that customers appreciate the variety of offerings.

"One thing Dan and I have really focused on is doing traditional German and Belgian styles of beer with a Northwest flair," Stephen Hughes says. "I think the European styles are really what draw us."

ColdFire's beer menu (decorated beautifully in chalk artwork by artist Clover Ross) shows a diversity of beer types. The St. James India Red Ale, named after family friend Jim Weston, oatmeal stout and NW Ale form a foundation of flagships, while other offerings give a taste of the European-inspired brews that the brothers gravitate toward.

The Farmhouse Saison, for example, is divinely satisfying in its earthy, hearty flavor. ColdFire's Berliner Weisse beer tastes tart, sharp and refreshing.

"Lagers, farmhouse beers, good German ales — I think our experiences in Germany and Austria really impacted Dan and I as home brewers, so it's definitely something we wanted to highlight in our brewery," Stephen Hughes says.

The brothers started home brewing in 2000, but a 2011 backpacking trip to Europe — with stops in Germany, Hungary, Austria, Croatia, Montenegro and Turkey — had a lasting influence on their beer-making style.

"We ate well and we drank well," Dan Hughes remembers.

The Hughes brothers grew up in Cottage Grove, but they descend from Irish and German stock, and that heritage manifests not only in their beers but in their logo, as well. The logo has four meanings: It contains the Hughes family crest; it resembles an eagle, which represents Germany; it bears the shape of a hop; and embedded in the design is the Irish symbol for infinity.

The name ColdFire itself is a reference to fermentation — cooking food without heat.

"Fermentation is the most important aspect of brewing," Stephen Hughes says. "You can go wrong in a lot of ways, but if your fermentation is good, it makes the beer what it is."

As ColdFire Brewing expands its production space starting next year, the Hughes brothers say they want to prioritize their company values, including the fact that ColdFire is family-friendly, complete with a kids area and extra diapers and wipes in the bathroom.

And, of course, they'll be brewing more exciting new beers to try — Belgian beers, wild beers and sour beers, to name a few.

"More than anything, balance is really important in our beers," Stephen Hughes says. "Occasionally we'll do something that's big and crazy, but for the most part we want people to be able to try and enjoy a couple of different things. That's what I'm really aiming for in a lot of my recipe creations."

ColdFire Brewing Company is located at 263 Mill Street in downtown Eugene and is open 4 to 10 pm Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 11 pm Fridays and Saturdays and noon to 10 pm Sundays. Learn more at coldfirebrewing.com.

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