

“Our cocktails are really special,” Jensen says. “We squeeze all super-fresh juice and add all sorts of wonderful herbaceous tenacious herbs.”

She says their vodka is a top seller, but the Jensens have a passion for whiskeys and rums, of which Thinking Tree will soon have a profusion. The product is created in a high-quality still and refined through mostly repurposed machinery — much of it comes from old dairy equipment — even the bar in the tasting room is made of repurposed wood from the building’s original 1927 siding.

For Jensen, who is also a member of well-known local music act Eleven Eyes, our region’s bounty is always at the forefront. In a way, Thinking Tree is an extension of Jensen herself. She says the name is derived from images of Pacific Northwest freedom — singing under trees, the music, the abundance of the Willamette Valley.

The air in the distillery smells authentically yeasty, rustic and evocative of Northwest ideals. If you want to smell it yourself, Thinking Tree is already open; a formal grand opening is slated for mid-March, depending on the availability of product.

Jensen says the whiskey will decide the timing of the grand opening — a fitting quip for someone whose mission is focused on the valley’s voice and allowing the territory to speak for itself.

*Thinking Tree Spirits is located at 88 Jackson St. As of now, the tasting room is open 3-7 pm Thursdays, 3-8 pm Fridays and Saturdays. Check out their Facebook page for more information and updates.*

## DEEP WOODS DISTILLERY (OAKRIDGE)

It’s always worth a drive to Oakridge.

Highway 58 is beautiful. Along the way you’ll pass thousands of evergreens, acres of farmland, lakes, rivers, campsites and waterfalls. After a knockout bout with the recession, Oakridge is slowly repositioning itself as a mecca for outdoorspeople, recreationists and lovers of all things craft.

The traveling drinker’s treat, of course, awaits on First Avenue — the town’s cultural hub. Here, among other gems, sits Deep Woods Distillery.

Husband-and-wife team Mick Garvin and Cindy Noblitt opened their tasting room late last year and have since seen a positive response. DIY by nature, Deep Woods Distillery is still in its nascent stages, but creative forces have already taken hold. The small facility comes complete with a garden, which in summertime will bear fruit for use in the distillery’s various unique products.

“We’ll do a lot of berries,” Garvin says. “We have some plums and cider apples planted ... raspberries,

blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, loganberries.”

With an extensive background in forest contracting and preservation efforts, the pair has seen its share of Oregon’s great outdoors. Garvin and Noblitt hold nature and outdoor communities in high regard, and this works its way by osmosis into Deep Woods’ spirits.

Fruit aside, their best-selling spirit is a grain neutral gin substitute called “Fir of the Doug,” which contains spring tips of Douglas fir. Gathered and frozen during various contracting gigs, the young tree tips give this liquor an uncanny forest smell. With a powerful nose but surprisingly subtle, floral flavor, Fir of the Doug is perfect for use in cocktails that would ordinarily call for gin.

“Because of all of our work, we’re in the right place at the right time to get the tips,” Noblitt says. “I guess it’s fairly unique. I know of one other distillery in Oregon that uses the tips, and they use it in a brandy.”

True to form, Deep Woods Distillery offers a good few other spirits you probably haven’t tried before. One such liquor is Krupnikas, a spiced honey liqueur popular in Poland and Lithuania. Don’t be fooled by the word “liqueur,” though. As Garvin puts it, the way they drink this stuff in Europe is strong enough to “light your breath on fire.”

“They drink it pretty high-velocity back there,” he says. “We’re gonna put it out, oh, probably about 90 proof.”

A preliminary nose-pinch is not required when drinking Krupnikas. The result is a sweet, spicy, Christmasy hug in a glass. You can really taste the balance, the hours Garvin and Noblitt have spent trying to perfect the recipe. At the end of the day, balance is key to the business as a whole, just as it is in nature.

Deep Woods Distillery supports its community by hiring local artists to design its labels (depicting local landforms), using sustainable practices (such as those found with the Doug fir tips) and by encouraging you to visit them in Oakridge, as you’ll enjoy the experience more than a bottle from your local liquor store.

Plus, as you already know, the nature in Oakridge is fantastic — like the Alpine mountain bike trial near town.

“If you are familiar with the trails around here, Alpine goes up a ridge, back over there, and overlooks Oakridge, facing the Cascades,” Garvin says. “On the right day you’ll be able to watch as the shadows cover the valley, but the sun is still across the mountain tops and the full moon is coming up over the cascades. It’s probably going to be a label someday.”

*Deep Woods Distillery is located at 48217 E. First Street, Oakridge. For more information on hours and products, phone 541-968-4623.*



THINKING TREE DISTILLERY



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