

TALK CRAFT BEER

EIGHTH ANNUAL POURING AT THE COAST TAKES OVER THE SEASIDE CONVENTION CENTER MARCH 18



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Try tastes from New Belgium Brewing at the beer festival.



Deschutes Brewery has been a past participant at Pouring at the Coast and will again appear at the festival this year.



Rusty Truck Brewing will be on hand at this year's festival.

By KATHERINE LACAZE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

When a bevy of beer samples converges with the breeze and spray of the ocean, it can only mean one thing: It's Pouring at the Coast in Seaside.

In its eighth year, this annual event, to be held from 3 to 8 p.m. Saturday, March 18 at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, promises a taste of some of the best craft beer being brewed in Oregon and parts of Washington in a beach-town setting.

While many communities in the Pacific Northwest host local craft beer festivals, Pouring at the Coast "really does have its own flair and flavor," according to Brian Owen, executive director of the Seaside Chamber of Commerce. "It's one of the first for the year, and then also, it's a destination," he said. "It's more than just a beer fest. It's a day at the beach. It's an (invitation to) 'Come play and stay in Seaside.'"

'Interesting and fresh'

The partnership between Seaside Brewing Company and the chamber, which began a few years into the event, has been crucial to optimizing the

festival experience for both attendees and vendors. While the chamber has resources for planning, promoting and presenting the event, Jimmy Griffin and his team at the brewery have a connection to the craft beer industry and know what it takes to entice other breweries to participate.

"(Griffin) talks beers," Owen said. "He understands what a brewer needs and how to attract them to come and be a vendor ... He knows the players."

Each of the approximately 40 breweries in attendance will offer from one to a few different varieties, introducing and familiarizing people with their brand. Some use it as "a live lab to break out some of their new stuff for the spring and summer; some stick with their old standards," Griffin said, adding, "Making a friend who loves your beer is the whole goal."

The organizers aim for diversity among breweries and brewers to give the festival variety and depth. About half the companies coming this year have participated in the past, and the rest are new faces. After ensuring the local coastal companies receive "a good representation," Griffin tries to bring in multiple new breweries to "keep it interesting

and fresh for the people who come every year."

For locals, the festival is an opportunity to sample selections from companies who don't normally distribute to the coast. For visitors, the festival is one more good reason to come to the beach.

Participants can travel among the breweries, sampling what catches their eye and discussing the drinks. Rather than relying on volunteers who may not be familiar with the brands or beers, the organizers ask the breweries to pour their own beer, which is done by the brewer, owner or a representative. The idea, Griffin said, is people don't want to merely try a beer, "they want to hear the story behind the beer."

Because of the ratio of breweries to attendees, the event is conducive to plenty of one-on-one time.

"It's kind of perfect the way we do it," Griffin said. "It's a good healthy number of breweries, for sure, but there's also a lot of personal interaction."

Last year, about 800 people attended the festival. Based on online sales as of early March, the event will have significant attendance by out-of-town visitors, from Portland and Eugene to Seattle and Tacoma, Washington. In addition to

the chamber's more robust social media campaign through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, many of the breweries are marketing the event within their local communities, according to Owen.

"This year, we are communicating in areas we never have," he said. "So we are looking for a little bump in attendance. This year, hopefully, my goal is for 1,000."

Gone this year, but not forgotten

While marginal growth for the afternoon tasting is anticipated, a slightly different look to the overall event is a certainty.

For starters, the Oregon Coast Brewer's Dinner, the traditional and well-loved kick-off to Pouring at the Coast held the night before, will not take place this year.

"There was a conflict we were not able to overcome in a timely manner," Owen said. "We did have to put that off to the side."

The organizers hope to bring it back in coming years, although the dinner likely will be revamped or restructured.

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