

# For Astoria's top brewers, it's about 'family'

## Brews & News

• **Fort George** has pulled the plug on its Festival of the Dark Arts, a celebration of dark beers. The February festival usually draws thousands of people, but the brewery decided there was no way to safely spread out the crowds. Stay tuned for other Stout Month events, however.

• **Buoy Beer Co.** has released its special Doppelbock Decapitator, available for a limited time in the taproom and in bottles. The delicious dark brew was aged for a year in Fireside Bourbon barrels. Enjoy!

• **Obelisk** is on track to open its Astoria brewery this spring. Permits are in hand and remodeling is underway inside the former Columbia Fruit & Produce building on Bond Street, including a ramp leading to a new entrance that will open into a taproom.

BY WILLIAM DEAN

They share hops, grain and other essential supplies in a pinch. They collaborate from time to time on special beers. They call each other “friends” or “family.”

Definitely not rivals.

The brewers behind Astoria's booming craft beer business are stubbornly collegial, offering support, tips and sometimes even recipes when asked. They applaud when someone leaves the nest to risk a start-up of their own.

With another brewery opening in spring 2022, competition for supermarket space and bar taps will only get tougher. And yet the nurturing community vibe persists.

“They're my friends,” Michal Frankowicz, head brewer at Fort George Brewery, said of his fellow beer makers. “It's not competitive between us. We're always there to help each other, no matter what



Photos by William Dean

**Fort George Brewery head brewer Michal Frankowicz at the control panel for the new waterfront brewing facility.**

the situation is.”

That pledge was proven recently when one of Frankowicz's creative brewers, Dave Coyne, announced he was leaving Fort George to launch Obelisk Beer Co.

Obelisk is preparing to open in a few months in a converted former warehouse less than a mile from Frankowicz's waterfront brewing facility. In many competitive businesses, such a move could be viewed as a threat. Not in the craft beer business.

Coyne, who is teaming with Nathan Lampson, another Fort George alum, says they've received nothing but support from their former colleagues.

“Lots of pats on the back,” Coyne said. “They really want us to succeed.”

On other levels, the family spirit among brewers is equally remarkable. They all share stories of helping each other out during various ill-timed supply shortages — from boxes of hops and bags of grain to aluminum cans and glass growlers.

John Dalgren, head brewer at Astoria Brewing Co., remembers running out of a certain type of hops at an inopportune time. His batch could have been ruined, but he put a call out to other local brewers and the key ingredient was rushed to his downtown brewhouse.

“They've done it for me, and I'll do it for them if I can,” he said.

Perhaps the single-biggest evidence that a true community of brewers exists is its eagerness to create special beer together — a sign of mutual respect.

Collaboration beers between two or

more breweries, often using unique ingredients and recipes, demonstrate how the art of beer-making and the consumer come first, despite mounting competitive pressures. Most of Astoria's breweries have collaborated in the past, often for charity.

And then there's that willingness to share recipes. Frankowicz says a home brewer called him one day asking how to make a certain Fort George beer. The brewer sent the man the full “brew sheet” and wished him well.

It all seems a bit strange. Would Coke and Pepsi share secrets? Did Steve Jobs and Bill Gates ever compare notes?

Brewers are just different, said Matt Jones, head brewer at Buoy Beer. “For us, it's definitely about community. We would always help another brewery if we can.”

While the quest to create a signature IPA or stout is never-ending, between brewers it's a friendly pursuit of perfection, not a rivalry, said Christina LaRue of the Oregon Brewers Guild.

“Everybody's vying for tap handles, but it's not cutthroat,” she says. “It's a family.”

*Editor's note: We hope you enjoy this new column exploring the region's burgeoning craft beer scene, with monthly dispatches on special brews and events and behind-the-scenes looks at the art of beer-making.*

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**Frankowicz inside Fort George's waterfront brewhouse, part of a recent major expansion.**