

Couple updates traditional drink



Michelle Scandalis and Jeremy Kyncl have channeled their love of pollinators and plants into Hierophant Meadery.

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

A Washington state couple has taken the tradition of mead-making and updated it with a focus on honey, pollinators and health.

Husband and wife Jeremy Kyncl and Michelle Scandalis opened Hierophant Meadery 10 years ago. Hierophant was an ancient Greek priest who represented holy traditions.

Mead is a fermented beverage made of honey, water and yeast. It is often referred to as honey wine.

The couple makes mead in Freeland, Washington, on Whidbey Island. They have two stores, in Freeland and the town of Mead, Washington, north of Spokane. They also sell at farmers markets.

Both have studied herbal science. Those studies led to another question.

“How did we do medicine for the vast majority of our history as humans, and what is the science that actually informs that now?” Kyncl said.

As college students, they got into home brewing.

“Which a lot of people do, it’s a pretty

usual story,” Kyncl added. “It’s not as normal for you to take that and make a business out of it.”

Looking at the Spokane market a decade ago, they felt it was nearing a saturation point with breweries. Since that time, the number of breweries has at least doubled, Kyncl said.

But the couple liked a lot of different things about mead.

“Honey tends to taste good with darn near everything,” Kyncl said.

That gives him a lot of freedom with ingredients.

“I could pull off of all of these really ancient traditions to inform modern mead-making and really bring these ingredients to people’s palates in a way that was approachable,” he said.

Except for 2020, the business has had double-digit growth in sales each year, bolstered by the general interest in craft beer and cider.

“People are looking to try new places and new things, they’re looking for their experience with alcohol to bring value in the form of exploration, challenge and interest,” Kyncl said.

Kyncl predicted the mead industry will continue to grow.

“A really heavy majority of the population still hasn’t tried it,” he said. “If they have, they’ve only had one, most of the time.”

Some meaderies stick to the traditional, 15th century English style of mead, which has a sweeter taste, Scandalis said.

“There are people out there that haven’t tried a mead that they’ve enjoyed,” she said. “We try to craft our particular line-up to complement cider, beer or wine.”

The business works with the farmers who provide ingredients. The wildflower honey primarily comes from eastern Washington beekeepers.

Adam and Ashli Manson, owners of Highland Honey Farm in Deer Park, Washington, supply honey to Hierophant Meadery. The couples met while selling their products at farmers markets.

“It’s an art, it’s an actual art,” Adam Manson said of Hierophant’s recipe. “I think it’s very artistic, the way they do it.”

Manson marveled at the way his honey’s flavors and colors play a part in the mead. Whether the honey’s from eastern Washing-

ton or Idaho or comes from canola or blueberries makes a difference, he said.

“It’s a pretty cool deal,” he said. “They’re good at what they do.”

Hierophant Meadery grew from purchasing buckets of honey to buying 55-gallon barrels. They anticipate using more than 3,000 gallons of honey this year, Scandalis said.

It took several years of intense trial-and-error to learn to make a high-quality mead.

The company now produces 1,000 to 1,500 gallons a month. The volume in 2020 was the same as in 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but in 2021, the couple doubled the amount of mead they sold compared to the year before, Scandalis said.

“We’re getting to that point where we’re thinking, ‘OK, how big do you want to get?’” she said.

The couple wants to be as sustainable as possible, focusing on beehive health and the inputs they use.

“Choosing mead was really based around that,” Scandalis said. “We are also very passionate about plants. Working with honey as a medium is a wonderful marriage.”

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