

ASTORIANS GATHER TO CELEBRATE CRAFT BEER

BY WILLIAM DEAN

On a misty May afternoon, the vibe at Buoy Beer Co.'s first lager festival was, well, buoyant.

Hundreds of beer lovers flocked to Frühlingsfest, weather be damned, and were rewarded with a bevy of exquisitely crafted brews, ranging in color from pale to dark and in style from Mexican to Franconian.

An accordionist ventured into a Neil Diamond tune as taps flowed with offerings from more than a dozen breweries. Kids danced, people sang. Fortunate souls sampled an amazing rye beer collaboration called Wry Sense of Lager.

And after much pandemic-related self-denial, festival attendee Andrew Bawol, of Rockaway Beach, beamed. "After two-plus years of being stuck with my wife in the house, it's so good to be out with people," Bawol said, with boxer "Hannah" at his feet. "It feels so nice to be social again. I've missed social interaction."

Meredith, his wife, agreed. "Just being with a group of people again," she said, was nice. Andrew couldn't resist adding a mask free reference. "Just seeing them smile," he added.

Seven days later, Fort George Brewery hosted a festival of its own, its first since 2020. The weather, finally in sync with beer lovers' hopes and dreams, was sunny and warm.

Don't kick yourself for not going. Tickets to the Lupulin Ecstasy Festival, a celebration of IPAs and, well, beer in general, sold out in about 20 minutes, according to the brewery. That's the kind of pent-up demand for hoppy fun there is in Astoria these days.

There were men and women with baby strollers, towering inflatable beasts led by a snarling T. rex and bands cranking out rock and reggae. A trumpet player strayed 60 feet from the stage to, literally, jazz up the crowd.

Spread out across the lush, flowering grounds of the historic downtown Flavel House Museum, the former home of a sea captain who probably would have approved of the boozy celebration, hundreds of people wandered and sipped Northwest crafted beer.

One of this year's special release gems was an IPA collaboration between



Brews & News

Pilot House Distilling, which partners with Buoy Beer Co., recently took a major step toward moving into its expanded waterfront space along the Astoria Riverwalk with the installation of new equipment used to produce whiskey, bourbon and other spirits. Plans also call for a bar and tasting room. No opening date has been set.

Fort George Brewery has released Beach Eagle, the latest installment in its seasonal lager series. The Mexican style pale lager is crisp and refreshingly smooth. Available in pubs and online.

Reach Break Brewing has hired a new brewer. The arrival of Kyle Fosbinder, who previously worked at Buoy Beer Co. as well as Culmination Brewing in Portland, will allow Buoy founder Josh Allison to focus more on steering growth. Fosbinder made the move to focus on creative freedom.

three breweries. Clear with a floral finish, the release was brewed by Fort George, Ravenna Brewing Co., of Seattle, Washington, and Alvarado Street Brewery, of Salinas, California.

"Hope you enjoy the 3-Way," the man at the tap said, and the woman next to him



Photos by William Dean

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Andrew Bawol offers a taste to 'Hannah,' a boxer, at Frühlingsfest. At Fort George Brewery's Lupulin Ecstasy Festival, attendees gather on the lawn of the Flavel House Museum as an inflatable T. rex looks on. Souvenir mugs and beer lists await guests at Buoy Beer Co.'s Frühlingsfest.

"We're social creatures," Heiny replied. His partner, Melissa Ehret, had her own reasons. "To have a good time," Ehret said. "Take away some of the negativity for a couple of hours." Welcome back, beer festivals. We missed you.

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laughed. That's the kind of tongue-in-cheek banter we've been missing. Jesse Heiny, of Seaside, took it all in with a smile from a bench on the south side of the stately mansion. Vital questions were posed to him: Why attend a beer festival? Why is it important?