

Brews from A1

Mathys said. “A lot of the smaller breweries in the microbrew world are still going to be seven barrels or more.”

After a soft opening of two craft beers, the owners plan on producing a total of four of their own signature beers from the nanobrewery.

The decision to start brewing was largely in response to feedback the business was already getting.

“It’s an idea that’s been batted around for at least five years that I know of,” said Mathys. “Once we started to talk about it, people were like, ‘When? When?’”

Besides local interest, Mathys said travelers from I-5 have come in expecting to try what Cottage Grove has to offer.

“We have people pull off the freeway thinking we already are a brewery,” he said. “People really, really care about that. They really do. They want to drink the beer that’s made nearest where they’re standing right now.”

Owners of the combined businesses of The Brewstation and Coast Fork Feed Store have approached the entire venture with patience, making only incremental changes when they’ve felt the time was right.

“Anything worth having is worth waiting for,” said co-owner Emily Rinck of the upcoming nanobrewery. “It’s all down to rubber stamps at this point.”

Meanwhile, newcomer Covered Bridge Brewing Group is situated to enter the scene this year on the northeast corner of Hwy 99 and Main Street. In addition to a selection of craft beers brewed in-house, the business will also serve its own locally brewed coffee.

“The premise of Covered Bridge Brewing Group is to give Cottage Grove a place for everybody to sit down, enjoy themselves, without stress,” said co-owner David Barclay, who specializes in coffee brewing. “What we want is to give Cottage Grove a great place to gather.”

By the numbers, it’s an ambitious project.

The proposed seven-barrel microbrewery is slated to host 16 taps, which will consist of seven flagship beers and three rotating seasonals. When licensing comes through, it will also include taps for two ciders, two sodas and one for coffee.

“If we can make it ourselves, we’ll do it in-house,” Barclay said.

The group’s beer brewer, Nate Sampson, and

Barclay met in 2014 and soon after combined their skills to create a porter Barclay described as “out of this world.” Confident more of this collaboration could be brought to their own business, Barclay and his wife eventually joined with Sampson and fourth co-owner Chrissy Chapman to create a vision for the venture.

Part of the vision will include a beer garden and leased space for four food trucks in the brewpub’s rear seating area. At full steam, the group hopes to be employing a staff of around a dozen.

“And the great thing is, we’re here at the gateway,” said Barclay. “[We can] draw people here, get them downtown.”

This idea was a winning pitch at this year’s Chamber of Commerce Business Challenge, an event intended to stimulate local business growth, as the group took first place in the contest.

While the group is in financial talks and still has construction and licensing to complete, the owners are hopeful they will be operating by early fall, putting them on a similar schedule with The Brewstation and raising the prospect of a craft beer explosion in Cottage Grove this year.

Neither business can claim the title of pioneer in this territory, however. Locals will remember the now-defunct Hard Knocks Brewing touted itself as “Cottage Grove’s first and only brewpub” for its short life on Main Street next to Trailhead Park.

Opened in 2014, the pub had closed by 2016 due to a number of factors depending on who’s being asked. In interviews with industry publications and on radio, business owner Ben Price had laid blame at the feet of a city government which he characterized as being unnecessarily difficult to work with and cited a hostile local population among business woes.

For The Brewstation, which opened around the same time with only guest taps, the Cottage Grove craft beer experiment turned out quite differently. Rinck doesn’t think of Hard Knocks’ story as a cautionary tale.

“Because I’m different and this business is different,” she said. “The community has been so supportive of us that I can’t even help but not try.”

Local Impact

Indeed, community feedback cited by both upcoming breweries paint Cottage Grove as a city eager to taste its own hometown brew. Though both businesses will be throwing their hat into the brewery ring around the same time, owners from both businesses welcome the prospect of more than one brewery opening up in town.

“It would be ideal, actually,” said Rinck.

“The funny thing about the brewing industry ... is that craft brewers want more craft brewers,” Mathys said. “That’s the odd thing about it. It’s not like normal American competition.”

To that point, owners and brewers from both businesses are not only aware of each other’s plans, but willingly collaborative in their pursuits.

“They have no problems helping each other out,” said Mathys. “The whole idea is to have more craft beer. We would be delighted if we got this brewery off the ground and someone opened a microbrewery in Drain or Elkton.”

From a business perspective, a community with more variety in its options is ideal as it generates a bigger draw and appeal to a wider consumer palate.

“And it is a symbiotic relationship,” Rinck said, “because the thing that’s interesting in this style of business — whether it be the brewery or Covered Bridge Brewing Group or

Axe and Fiddle or Jack Sprats — is that the more businesses that are in one location the better business gets.”

For craft beer enthusiasts, especially, it can be noted that a variety of choice is an alluring ingre-

dient when deciding where to go. A town with more than one brewery is a potential magnet for such a culture.

“It’s more of a draw, which brings more money to this community,” said Rinck. “Every dollar that is

spent in this business gets put back in the community. And that’s huge.”

While Cottage Grove itself stands to gain from this foray into brewing, there are also positive implications for the wider region.



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