

Fall Competitions

October: Märzen

Trail Point Brewery

October means Oktoberfest which means Märzen's! Back to lagering and finding the recipe that is just right. For some reason, I always thought caramel and a slight sweetness when about the flavor and aromas connected to this style. I was lucky enough to be selected to judge this month and was able to taste multiple beers using the BJCP Style Guidelines and learned that it should be bready and toasty, not caramel. It should be dry (ferment it all the way) and moderately bitter. A little European hops flavor is ok and can add some complexity. Eric Smead took top prize with Kyle Thaxton and Greg Sanial taking second and third. If you wanted to see what a Märzen that doesn't attenuate completely and attempts to add more yeast after cold conditioning taste like (trust me, you really don't) than taste some of mine. I'm still figuring out lagering and having problems with my beers finishing correctly but I'm not giving up. I've started using Yeast Starters and Yeast Nutrients and making sure I've oxygenated my beer before capping my fermenter to increase my chances of finishing at the correct final gravity.

Now a word from our President:



I'm kicking this off with a letter I came across in 'Pints West', the quarterly magazine of the Bristol, UK area branches of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), which celebrates the pub and the people who make it work. Reprinted with permission.

Cheers to Fourteen Years: My Bittersweet Farewell To A Job Like No Other

In the heart of any community lies a pub. Not a bar. A real pub, with real regulars, real beer (and real crisps). Whether the country declares war, or there's a birth in the village, the pub is where we all go to discuss, mourn, or celebrate. After fourteen years spent either front or back of house, navigating the ins and outs (and dramas) of the pub trade, I find myself reflecting on the myriad experiences that make working in or running a proper, traditional pub a unique and character-defining journey.

A pub is more than a watering hole. It's the sum of its community. From the seasoned regulars who have their designated tables (and be prepared for the furtive glances you get if you sit in their spots) to the newcomers seeking a quiet moment in the middle of their afternoon's shopping, the pub is a melting pot where stories are shared, friendships are forged, and the tapestry of local life is woven. Managing this environment is not for the faint of heart. Early starts are marked with the stench of bleach and too strong coffee, while late nights become a battle with those ale-sozzled patrons unwilling for their revelries to end. You mop the floors on aching feet, and swig that glorious, well-earned closing pint by the door, before trudging home to force down a slice of toast and fall unconscious to do it all over again tomorrow. Like the myth of Sisyphus pushing the boulder up the mountain every single day, the monotonous rhythm becomes ingrained in the very fabric of your existence. Not enough sleep, and never the energy or motivation for healthy food or healthy habits. Always on the brink of burn-out, with never quite enough time off to fully recuperate.

At times it is rough, I will not deny it. And unless you have done it yourself, you can not fully imagine how much it takes from you, both physically and mentally. So why do we do it? Why did I keep doing it as long as I did? And why is it that now I am out, I feel such a deep sense of loss, as though I am in mourning?

The answer is simple. It is you, my dear, sweet, hilarious, exasperating regulars. A pub has something intangible, and truly magical, that everybody wants – a sense of belonging stronger than anywhere else. Whether you are a bartender or a Friday-night drinker, or my lovely, wonderful old boys there every single day, you become family. I know you. I have seen you at your highest and your lowest and you have seen me at mine. The tableaux of existence that define what we are: "My husband just died," "My daughter is having a baby." I have been there. Sometimes invisible, sometimes included, but I have witnessed the moments of your lives that make you beautiful and divine, and deeply human.

Whether it is the comforting warmth of the fireplace or the carefully curated decor that tells tales of the pub's history (for a while we even had a regular's ashes on the shelf, above his spot), or just having someone who will stop and listen to what you have to say, I hope all will always be able to find solace in the familiar embrace of their local.

I say farewell now, to such a large part of my identity for the last fourteen years. I carry with me a treasure trove of memories and wisdoms (sometime given to me whether I like it or not by one who has had a few too many), a fair amount of random scars (both physical and mental), and a deep love for the most holy of British institutions, the pub.

From the most jovial banter at (and more importantly, behind) the bar, to the quiet moments of reflection during closing time, the traditional pub with all its quirks and charms, is not merely a business; it is a custodian of community spirit, an anchor in the ebb and flow of life. A place where the past lingers in every pint pulled and the future is toasted in the company of friends, old and new. Cheers to fourteen years of stories, laughter (and tears), and the enduring legacy of the local pub. And that is time at the bar.

Zee Gillespie

(no longer at the Drapers Arms in Bishopston).

That prompts a shout out to Chris Gibbons, proprietor of **Brass Ring Brewing** in Alger Heights, which is as close as you'll find hereabouts to a British pub, certainly in terms of his wonderful Cask Ales and classic pub food such as bangers and mash! Photo above, of his tap handles, by Scott Garrison.

I recently represented PrimeTime Brewers at **GRCC's Craft Brewing Advisory Committee** meeting, where Dr. Werner Absenger, Program Director, made the point that 'Brewpubs', which make up the majority of our local breweries, are essentially 'hospitality operations'. This makes sense since MLCC licensing requirements include having at least 25% of gross sales coming from food and non-alcoholic beverages, having a manufacturing operation on the licensed premises (hence the mash tun, kettle and fermenters in the background), and selling their products only on the premises, with no distribution to wholesalers (there's an exception for the smallest brewpubs, who can self-distribute). Pretty demanding stuff, and tough to make a living in the current market, which had already flattened prior to Covid and has downturned since.

GRCC for its part is looking at what the craft brewing industry needs in terms of people and skills, how to meet those needs and how to promote themselves. They have a hatful of interesting initiatives, including attending the brewers guild festivals going forward.

And that prompts me to list - with great appreciation - the brewing establishments and other sponsors PrimeTime has visited this year, or will by year-end. They are: Brewery Vivant, Jaden James, Thornapple, Broadleaf, Fountain Hill (GRCC), VanderMill, Mitten, Brewery Nyx, Bier Distillery, Cold Break, Adesanya, 3 Gatos, Gravel Bottom, Two Guys, City Built, Speciation, Railtown, Brass Ring and Rockford Brewing. We're fortunate to have such a plethora of craft brewing expertise right on our doorsteps!

Our own **Brewer Of The Year** (BOTY) competition, with just one round to go, is neck and neck between Bill Smith (2023 winner) and Greg Sanial (2022 winner). Come along to the November meeting at Brewery Vivant to see who has the best Belgian Tripel and will claim the plaque and accompanying prize, to be presented at the Christmas party.

In local competitions, PrimeTimers have collected medals at Siciliano's, Glintcap (Great Lakes International Cider & Perry), Michigan Cup, O'Connors West Michigan Brew-Off, and others further afield including notable successes at the National Homebrew Competition by Jeff Carlson and Matt Mead. Still to come this year is the Kent County Club Competition, the last chance to qualify for next year's ProAm, open now for entries through Nov. 22. Details are on the website, of course!

PrimeTimers also featured strongly in the Beer City Brewers Guild Pro-Am Competition and two of us made it to Best of Show, but kudos to Rivertown Brewers who swept the prizes.

We've had three successful **Club Brew Days** this year at Matt Szukalowski's, Ric Brown's and my house. For the next one how about a **barrel-aged club beer**? We did this a few years ago with an Imperial Dark Saison and Joel Bierling at Bier Distillery has generously again offered us a 30-gallon exbourbon barrel. We'd need at least half a dozen of us to each brew and ferment 5 gallons of a mutually agreed recipe, then after we check they're all good (of course!), Joel will empty the barrel for us, fill it and he'll hold it for aging. When it's 'ready' we'll keg or bottle and share it out. Almost any style of beer can be barrel-

aged, though historically they've been 'bigger', higher alcohol beers which are less susceptible to spoilage. So, what should we make, who'll host a brew day, and when? Bring some ideas to the November meeting and let's see if we can get this barrel rolling!

Lastly, Upcoming Events Not To Be Missed

- Nov. 7 **Thirsty Thursday** at Mitten Brewing on Leonard.
- Nov. 9 **'Fire Brew'** at Grand Ledge Brewing (Frank Zamarripa is their President). See PTB website for details and sign up for 5 gallons of wort.
- Nov. 16 **Bus Trip** to Grand Haven area breweries. Sign up now via the website.
- Nov. 20 **Regular Meeting** at Brewery Vivant. Matt Mead will lead a chat about secondary fermentation in bottle conditioning.
- Dec. 5 **Thirsty Thursday** at Rockford Brewing.
- Dec. 15 **Annual Christmas Party & Fundraising Auction** at Thornapple Brewing.
Note this is a Sunday afternoon, 3:00-7:00 pm, which worked really well last year. Aside from membership dues this is our only fundraiser. We ask our sponsors and supporters to donate items we can raffle or auction that bring business to them, such as mug club memberships or tastings. We need all members to each out to their local to ask for their support. Keep an eye on the website for details.

And that, my friends, is time at the bar!

Cheers,

Ian Purvis