

Southern Oregon brewpub scene is hopping

By Jeff Duewel
of the Daily Courier

The brewpub scene may not be Portlandish in Southern Oregon, but it is growing.

Wild River Brewing and Pizza in Grants Pass, with its main restaurant, brewery and publick house across F street, originated with Shady Oaks Pizza Deli in 1975 in Cave Junction, fired up by Jerry and Bertha Miller.

Hubert Smith began brewing there in 1990, calling it Steelhead Brewery. It became Wild River in 1994 when the Grants Pass location opened, touting a river lifestyle.

Today, pizza still dominates the menu, and the large steel tanks behind the windows crank out close to 1,200 barrels (31 gallons each) a year, and another 500 in Cave Junction said Manager Shaun Hoback.

"Our philosophy has always been to brew traditional European-style beer," Hoback said.

Smith used to brew award-winning extra special bitter (ESB), and current brewer Scott Butts does the same, but the India Pale Ale (IPA) dominates sales now.

"ESB used to be our flagship, but all those ESB drinkers grew into IPA drinkers," Hoback said.

The Kolsch, Nut Brown and Double Eagle Imperial Stout are the standbys, and seasonal favorites include the Oktoberfest and Snug Harbor.

Butts and Hoback said the next big thing is the Double Cross, an unfiltered amber ale made from all-local ingredients, including organic hops from Ashland. Its initial run in January and February is gone, but another version is due in May with some Klamath Basin-grown malts, Butts said.

The Double Cross is an offshoot of the State of Jefferson, a hugely popular Wild River ale poured in 2009. (That mythical state's flag includes two crosses).

"Double Cross is a little more malty than the State of Jeff, and a little richer," Hoback said.

Today, Wild River has five locations — two in Grants Pass (Restaurant, 595 N.E. E St., 541-471-7147; Pub, 533 N.E. F St., 541-474-4456), Medford, Brookings and Cave Junction. A two-year experiment with distribution in stores is now over. For more, www.wildriverbrewing.com.

■ **SOUTHERN OREGON BREWING**, 1922 United Way, Medford. Tom Hammond, a Medford anesthesiologist by day, started



KEVIN LAUNIUS/Daily Courier

A pint of Kolsch is drawn at the Wild River Brewing Publick House.

brewing in 2007, and opened a tap room where patrons are encouraged to bring their own food.

"It's very common for people to grab a pizza and come to our place," Hammond said. "That's a common setup in bars in New York."

Patrons sit at a 40-foot-long bar and can watch the brewers in action through windows. The beer is on tap at 50 or 60 locations and 22-ouncers are now available in many stores, including 11 Trader Joe's around the state.

"We sell more beer in Portland than we do down here," Hammond said.

The pale, gold and porter dominate the sales, but seasonal barley wines and the "Nice Rack IPA" are also winners, Hammond said.

The head brewmaster is Scott Saulsbury, also known for his track and cross country exploits at Hidden Valley High in the mid-1980s. Saulsbury has also worked with Wild River in Grants Pass and Caldera in Ashland, Hammond said. For more, 541-776-9898; www.sobrewing.com

■ **CALDERA BREWING**, Tap house at 31 Water St., Ashland. Caldera comes in a can,

rare for microbrews, but don't let that scare you.

"It's a better package than a bottle. It doesn't let any air or light in," said Ray Cato, brand manager. "Light is a huge thing. That's why bottles are brown. We could afford a canning line at \$100,000. The bottling line was \$700,000."

Caldera makes 22 brews at its 540 Clover Lane Brewery, and production topped 4,259 barrels in 2010, sent to 13 states Cato said. There is no public tasting at the brewery.

The tap house occupies the former Rogue Ale brewhouse, destroyed by the Jan. 1, 1997, flood. Rogue has since moved to Newport and is one of Oregon's heavy-weight microbrewers.

Jim Mills, president and sole owner, founded Caldera 15 years ago and named it after rapids on the Upper Klamath River. Caldera

started distributing five or six years ago, and will have a new tasting room in a new building in about a year, Cato said. For more, 541-482-4677; www.calderabrewing.com.

■ **WALKABOUT BREWERY**, Central Point. Ross Litton, native of Perth, Australia, started brewing in Central Point in 1997.

The flagship beer is Worker's Pale Ale, on tap all over Southern Oregon and in 22-ounce bottles in stores for about the last year. Litton brewed 890 barrels out of his home-based brewery in 2010, and says a new brewery with a tasting room is in the works.

Litton was 22 when he arrived in the U.S., and learned to home brew. He worked for Rogue Ales in 1996, and after the flood that wiped out that brewery in Ashland started his own business.

The brews are named with Australian roots. Point the Bone, a double IPA, has aboriginal origins and refers to putting a curse on someone.

Jabberwocky Strong Ale will join Worker's Pale Ale in bottles soon.

To this point, the Tolo Tavern, 7878 Blackwell Road, has served as Walkabout's de facto tasting room, with all of Litton's beers on tap. For more, 541-664-7763.

■ **STANDING STONE BREWERY AND RESTAURANT**, 101 Oak St., Ashland. They make great beer and nobody has a more interesting building, built in 1925 as an automotive garage.

It's on the National Register of Historic Places and "remains Ashland's best surviving example of the simple utilitarian False-front form as it was employed in Southern Oregon during the 1920's," according to Nancy Bringham of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

The brewery makes 310-gallon batches of ales that include Pilot Rock Pale, the Madrone Red and double IPA.

Standing Stone champions sustainability. It uses mostly organic ingredients including some hops grown in Ashland.

The business also uses a number of energy-saving features, including solar panels to generate power. For more, www.standingstonebrewing.com; 541-482-2448.

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From May through October, jetboats offer excursions into the Wild and Scenic sections of the Rogue, giving passengers a close-up view of wildlife and breathtaking scenery. Salmon and steelhead fishing in the area is legendary. Ocean charters for fishing and sightseeing are also available. The 24th annual Wine, Art & Music Festival is planned for May 14 and 15 at Gold Beach Event Center. The event will feature libations from 15 regional wineries, the works of more than 40 artists, artisans and crafters, cuisine prepared by local chefs and entertainment.

■ **BROOKINGS**: Located at milepost 357 on Highway 101, the town is just six miles north of the California border. Brookings is

located at the junction of the Chetco River and the Pacific. The area is often referred to as the "banana belt" because of its sunny and temperate year-round climate. It boasts the privately owned Pelican Bay Lighthouse — the newest lighthouse on the Oregon Coast. Another point of interest is Alfred A. Loeb State Park; a fragrant myrtlewood forest with many trees that are more than 200 years old. Harris Beach State Park is just north of town. The Chetco River swirls and dances just beyond the park. One of the most anticipated summer events in Brookings is the annual Southern Oregon Kite Festival at the Port of Brookings Harbor. The festival is planned for July 16 and 17.

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