

Today in the JI

News

BREW-HA-HA. The Hop River brewing club knows its beers, the Andover-based group specializes in making home-brews. But it's not only the process of making beer that unites the club — members say they just want to have a good time when they get together. Page 4

Home brewers prove that not all beers are alike

By Adar Kaplan
Journal Inquirer

ANDOVER — All beers are not alike. Just ask Richard Rosen and the Hop River Brewers, an Andover-based homebrewing club. They'll tell you about the thousands of beers on the market — from ales, lagers, and ciders, to meads and hybrid styles.

And, Rosen says, local supermarkets and pubs aren't the only places you can get beer. You can make it in your own home, which is what he and the Hop River Brewers do.

There are about 40 people on the club's mailing list, with between 20 and 30 members attending monthly meetings, Rosen says. The club also boasts national recognition from the American Homebrewing Association.

Most members make their own beer at home but also brew with the club at monthly meetings, which take place in a small building next to Rosen's Route 6 home in front of the Hop River. Members pay \$5 to attend each meeting.

The brew house has two levels: on the first, a meeting room with couches, lounge chairs, and a library complete with brewing books and magazines.

Rosen's brewing kitchen, on the lower level, is decorated with a collection of beer bottles, advertisements, and beer towels from around the world. There, he has two refrigerators full of home-brewed beer in sterilized bottles. Two more fridges are located in an adjacent room, bursting with home-brews in bottles and small kegs.

A basin is in the corner, which is where Rosen and club members sterilize their bottles. Rosen uses that basin, he says, because he and his wife, Maureen, ran into problems years ago when she couldn't bathe their children because their tub was filled with bleach and beer bottles.

Cauldron-like pots sit on his stove, waiting to be used to make the latest brew — but not for long.

Choosing a "brew meister"

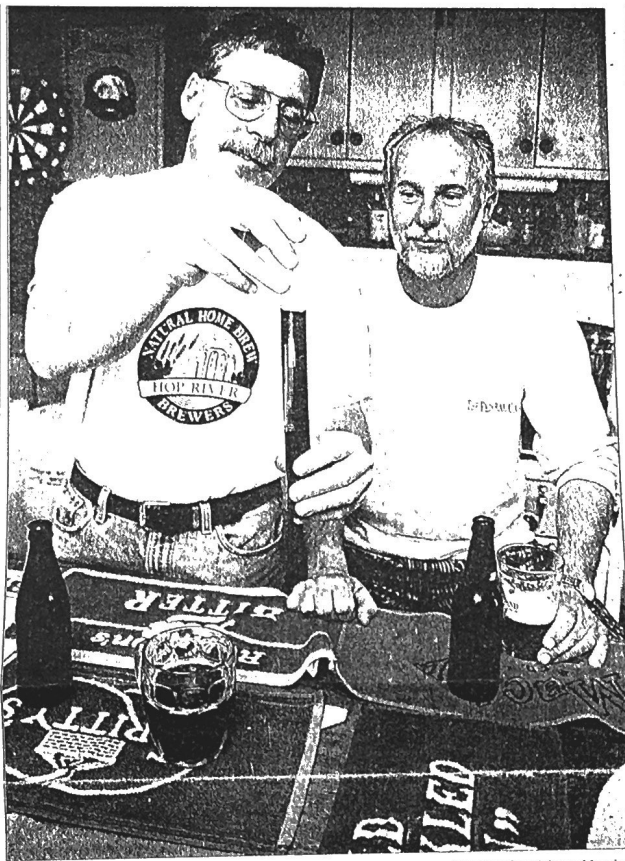
The monthly meetings are scheduled for the first Friday of every month, except during the summer. Club members first choose one "brew meister" to decide which kind of beer they'll brew that night. A brew meister is necessary, Rosen says, because the members are so enthusiastic about brewing.

"Some of these guys are into it like you wouldn't believe," Rosen says.

That is, too many brewers can spoil the beer.

There are two ways to make home-brews — the all-grain method or extract kits. Professional brewers use the more sophisticated all-grain method, which involves brewing from scratch, instead of using prepackaged supplies, like the malt mixes used in kits.

Beer starts with barley grains that are converted to sugars through a process called "mashing." That mixture is heated, which converts it to sugar, and the sugars are rinsed from the grain. In all-grain brewing, the brewer will go through this part of the process, and those who use kits will buy the



Gary Tucker / Journal Inquirer

Richard Rosen, left, and Paul Zocco, both of Andover, check out one of the home-brewed German dark lager beers.

converted grains in a prepackaged liquid or dry form.

The sugared water then is mixed with leafy greens called "hops" for flavor and aroma. Rosen grows his own hops behind his house.

Grains also can be added later in the process to make the brew light or dark. After that, the entire mixture is cooled, and yeast is added to convert the sugars to alcohol.

Then the beer is stored in sterilized bottles or small kegs and is left to ferment for about a week. Since carbon dioxide is lost during fermentation — leaving the beer without bubbles — corn sugar or malt is added to the leftover yeast for carbonation.

Need spurs popularity

The club brews as many kinds of beer as there are kinds of people in it. There are only men because no women have joined, Rosen says, but the members are everything

from biomedical engineers and chemists to musicians.

Rosen says he started brewing for fun in the 1970s, long before the club was established. He stopped until a few years ago, when a friend asked Rosen if he'd like to give it another try.

Rosen, a pharmacist at Manchester Memorial Hospital and 20-year Andover resident, couldn't have picked a better time to start brewing again.

According to Charlie Papazian, making beer at home has been around for years but wasn't legal until the late 1970s. Papazian is founder and columnist of Zymurgy, the magazine of the American Homebrewing Association named for the brewing fermentation process.

Papazian says the hobby gained popularity out of necessity. Beer enthusiasts traveled abroad to get imported beers because stores in the United States sold only a few domestic brews.

"If you wanted a special brew years ago, you had to make it," he says.

But by the 1990s, the hobby took off with the proliferation of imports, brew pubs, and microbreweries. Papazian says the beer-drinking population now numbers about 85 million people. Home-brewing technology also has improved, making it less expensive to brew your own beer than to buy it.

"You can spend between \$8 and \$10 on a six-pack or spend less than half that by investing a few hours brewing your own — and making more beer," Papazian says.

Rosen's club, for example, brews about 5 gallons per meeting.

Improved technology has allowed hobbyists to "miniaturize" what brewing companies do, Papazian says. Technology even has turned some brewers into "gadget geeks," people who tinker with their beer recipes and brewing equipment.

Papazian says that while the popularity of home-brewing spiked a few years ago, the numbers actually have leveled off because with so many imports, microbrews, and brew pubs, the necessity is gone.

Still, he says, there are more than 700 home-brewing clubs with between 30 and 50 members each that are affiliated with the American Homebrewing Association. Some clubs emphasize brewing techniques, and others are more social, Papazian says.

Striking a balance

Papazian was a guest lecturer of the Hop River Brewers in March. He says the club "seemed to reach a great balance of technique and enthusiasm."

Rosen says that he and the club members pride themselves on having attained that balance.

The Hop River Brewers hold many activities during the year, including an "Oktoberfest" picnic, a day of fishing and brewing, visits to local brew pubs, and games of softball, volleyball, and horseshoes.

Families of club members attend the events, Rosen says, which are held mostly at his home. Members bring their own food and, of course, their home-brews.

The club holds tastings, to which members bring their brews to Rosen's brew house and fill out score sheets to rate each beer on everything from aroma to appearance. Members also have taken top honors at local and state home-brewing competitions.

But don't let the awards fool you, Rosen says. The club doesn't take itself too seriously.

And according to club member Paul Zocco, that's what makes the Hop River Brewers so special — the club has no hierarchy or leadership. Club members just want to have a good time brewing and sampling each other's beers.

Have members of Rosen's club thought about brewing commercially?

"Some guys in the club are good enough," Rosen says, but the process of obtaining liquor licenses and larger equipment is lengthy and expensive.

"Besides, once it becomes a job, it's no fun," he adds.