

Life in LAMORINDA

What's on Tap in Lamorinda?

By Andrea A. Firth



Moraga beer brewer Scott Lothamer

If you ask Greg Wilson to describe his favorite hobby, he'll tell you, "...It's organic chemistry. You've got live organisms eating the sugar and turning it into carbon dioxide." Sounds gross, right? What he is describing is the fermentation process that goes on when he homebrews beer. Wilson, who lives in the Campolindo neighborhood of Moraga, got interested in making beer by watching a fraternity brother brew at MIT in the mid-1980's. When he returned to the Bay Area, he set out to make his own beer and has been brewing

in his backyard for over 20 years. "Homebrewing has definitely gotten a lot more popular over the last 15 to 20 years," notes Wilson.

Wilson brews beer eight to ten times a year usually for parties with family and friends. "It's fun to make different styles of beer that you wouldn't normally see. I can make some very unusual styles." For example, he makes a dark ale at Christmastime to which he adds orange peel, honey, and cinnamon.

And he typically brews special beers for an Oktoberfest celebration where he transforms his back-

yard into a beer garden complete with hanging globe lights, German music, barbecued sausages, and warm potato salad.

Wilson is not alone in his enthusiasm for zymurgy—the art of using fermentation in brewing or more easily put—making beer. Scott Lothamer, a resident of Moraga where he also maintains a dental practice, has taken the art of making beer to an elite level for an amateur brewer.

When his wife bought him a homebrewing kit back in 1993, "She did not know what she was getting into," says Lothamer with a laugh. Not long after receiving the gift, he had converted the potting shed into a customized "brew-house" where he makes his beer in 20-gallon batches (most homebrewers make 5- or 10-gallons at a time). "Most women don't like the smell, and that's why a lot of husbands that brew get banished to the outside." But he isn't lonely out there. His kegerator, a customized refrigerator that houses six kegs on tap, proves to be quite an attraction.

"The neighbors like to come over a lot," notes Lothamer.

Having majored in chemistry as an undergraduate, it's no surprise that Lothamer enjoys creating something that requires mixing, stirring, and propane burners. "I like to experiment a lot. Lagers and light beers are harder to make. So that's more of a challenge to me," he says. Lothamer uses different techniques when he experiments and sometimes plays with the taster's sensory perception. "One of the last beers that I made was a black pilsner," he describes. "It tastes like a light yellow beer, but I colored it...so it looks like a stout but doesn't taste like one."

Lothamer not only loves brewing beer; he's really good at it. He has competed in and advanced to the final round of the American Homebrewers Association National Competition, one of the largest homebrew competitions in the world with over 5,000

beer entries in a variety of categories. "A beer contest is a lot like a dog show," he explains chuckling. "You have certain style guidelines for each category. It has to be this dark, this sweet...certain flavors must be there and others don't belong."

So what does a beer aficionado like Lothamer do to celebrate Oktoberfest? He'll be camping with friends at a homebrewers festival enjoying gourmet meals prepared with and paired with the perfect homebrewed beers; of course!



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Andrea Firth's article on local brewers in this first October issue reminded some of us of the traditional German celebration of Oktoberfest. Whether you're planning your own Oktoberfest party, attending one elsewhere or too busy to worry about it, we'd like to share with you local author Linda Foley's reminiscences about her last visit to the real thing!

There is no Party Quite Like the Oktoberfest!

By Linda U. Foley



Al Foley's got the shades and the beer; life is good

Photo Linda U. Foley

toberfest. Here, promptly at noon, a ceremonial de-cogging of a huge keg—usually performed by the mayor—would signal the official start of the party. In that particular year of 2000, Buergermeister Christian Ude predicted that he would need no more than two huge swings with the hammer to send the cog flying and the beer flowing. It is said that reelection hinges upon this rite should the mayor need more than two tries. Bavarians take their beer and masculinity seriously.

Punctually, the Parade appeared with approximately 1000 participants of historically attired dancers, costumed performers, a Rifleman's Procession and an impressive stately group of wealthy beer hall landlords.

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Oktoberfest Vocabulary

- Wies'n** Bavarian lingo for meadow; in this case referring specifically to the Oktoberfest location
- Dimdl** Bavarian for young girl but most often referring to a style of dress comprised of an embroidered blouse with short puff sleeves, a tight fitting bodice closed in front with hammered silver buttons and cording, and a flowing skirt over many petticoats. Modern dimdl skirt versions are made of leather.
- Mas'** Bavarian for one liter of beer
- A Hoibe** Bavarian for one half liter; in high German it would be "Eine Halbe" but, Bavarians are very colorful and distinctive
- A Busserl** in high German it would be "Ein Kuss" or a kiss. Lots of that going on at the Oktoberfest.
- Herzertl** Herz in high German and in this case referring to the Gingerbread hearts decorated with every kind of endearment imaginable, to hang around your neck, usually purchased from one sweetheart for another
- Brez'n** in high German, Bretze, meaning pretzel. These are distinctive, wonderful large Laugen pretzels, heavily salted. (Laugen is lye. One needs to try these before deciding it sounds unpalatable.)
- Mandl'n** hot roasted sugared almonds, in a triangular bag
- Fisch am Steck'n** my favorite; roasted crisp trout on a stick. Incredibly savory and wonderful.
- Fischbroetla** luscious herring with loads of onions in a bakery-fresh roll
- Huhn am Steck'n** deliciously crisp and flavored rotisserie chicken
- Radi** large white radish, often sliced on the diagonal to pull apart like a fluffy accordion. All foods are perfect accompaniments to enhance the consumption of rivers of beer and ribald camaraderie

Loneliness is not a word that comes to mind when you are partying with 7.1 million 'friends' at the Oktoberfest in Munich. The 183-year old tradition commemorates the wedding of Bavaria's King Ludwig I to Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen. The location for the Oktoberfest has henceforth been called Theresien Wiese (Therese's Field) or in local lingo, Die Wies'n. The event usually lasts 16 days but in 2000—the year of our visit—the celebrations were extended by two holidays celebrating Germany's 10-year reunification.

also dressed in traditional clothing; the men wearing heavily silver-embroidered leather vests, velvet-trimmed jackets, cable knit and tasseled knee-high socks, Lederhosen (leather pants), and Knickerbockers (usually corduroy pants) suspenders trimmed with deer horn, and Haverl shoes, traditional footwear. The women attired in embroidered cotton blouses, voluminous wool skirts, lace petticoats, and colorful shawls. Languages spanning the globe and various German dialects floated into the overcast morning.

September 15, opening day, dawned and drizzled but hardly dampened our spirits. Our relatives were game to tackle this event with us even though many native Muenchners shun it like many New Yorkers do the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. My cousins dressed in traditional garb—Dirndl and Loden wear (water-resistant material made from sheep wool usually died a blue green color). Passengers on the S-Bahn—even non-natives—

My cousin knew in advance the route which the 'Parade of Landlords'—brewery owners—would take and which of the many huge beer halls had been selected for the opening ceremony. Considering the enormous crowd, such strategic planning was extremely helpful. The tent, Schottenhamel Festhalle, has a seating capacity of 9,500 and is always popular with celebrities. Seating reservations must be made months in advance—there is no random seating throughout the duration of the Ok-



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