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Local Home Brewers Ready to Raise a Glass to Oktoberfest

By Cathy Tyson



Troy Feddersen helps himself to a refreshing beer from his customized garage refrigerator. Photo Doug Kohen

brewing techniques, plan events and organize pub crawls. Feddersen estimates that a large percent of DOZE members are "certified judges" having passed the official Beer Judge Certification Program. "It's a very difficult exam to pass, much harder than my real estate license exam," he notes. At Parktoberfest he was proudly pouring a delicious German Hefeweizen, creamy head, medium body with a mind-boggling slight banana and clove finish.

Feddersen brews approximately ten to twelve times a year, usually in five gallon batches, which translates to about fifty beers per batch. With his current system, the maximum he can make is ten gallons. He adds, "If I had more time, I would brew more often. Depending on parties or events, I often run out of beer before my next creation is ready."

Look for Feddersen at the Bay Area Craft Beer Festival in Martinez on October 22. He will be pouring his Chocolate Oatmeal Stout, with Guinness-like nitrogen gas. There will be about eight home brewers from DOZE who will have their beverages available to try at their booth, in addition to an expected thirty commercial breweries pouring their beers.

For Mike Bernhardt of Moraga, his love of home brewing started with a brewing kit he received as a birthday present from his wife, Yvonne Lefort, just a couple of years ago. As his interest grew, so did the array of equipment in the garage - now they have a separate stand-alone freezer, a second fridge that has been tricked out with taps in the door, and an outdoor propane powered turkey fryer that has the necessary juice to get the beer cooking and kegs ready for sampling, not to mention a small capping machine and bottle sanitation equipment.

Despite a slightly messy setback on his first batch - an "issue" during fermentation - he's definitely hooked on Zymurgy. Wife Yvonne says that with a new avocation he goes in deep and quickly ascends the learning curve. At the very first competition he entered earlier this month, his Vienna Lager won first place in its category at the Oakland Dimond District's Oaktobefest. "I'm trying really hard to keep enough to share with guests" for an Oktoberfest get-together later this month.

When asked if there are any aspects of his day job that help in the beer making process, Bernhardt responded, "I'm a Senior Network Engineer with BART. I'd say that the ability to soak up knowledge, and to analyze and troubleshoot problems probably helps me to keep improving my brewing. There are a surprising number of home brewers who are in IT, at least in the Bay Area. I don't know if that's because of work skills or because they really need beer when they get home."

Like having the latest golf club, the "gadget factor" can be appealing to hobbyists. For Bernhardt, moderation is the key, "I've learned what will make a big difference and balanced that with my commitment and what I'm willing

Part art, part science, definitely a consuming and consumable hobby - Troy Feddersen and Mike Bernhardt are ready to celebrate Oktoberfest. With only four ingredients - malt, hops, yeast and water - that can be combined to produce an almost infinite variety of flavors, these gentlemen have found that making beer is a hobby they can sink their teeth into.

Lafayette resident, experienced brewer and local realtor Troy Feddersen started making beer at age eighteen with friends. He's come a long way from the simple brewing techniques of his younger years, expanding his knowledge and equipment collection. "There's a definite progression," he said, from extract brewing where the beer is ready to be enjoyed in two weeks to all-grain brewing. His advice: "The secret to excellent beer is good temperature control and lots of happy yeast. Anyone can learn to make their own good beer. It just requires paying attention to your recipe, process, and proper sanitation."

Why beer? "Quite simply, it's fun to make beer that I like, and to share it with others. It's like asking a chef what they like about cooking. A chef probably enjoys good food and enjoys their work in the kitchen, but what a chef is really about is sharing what they create with someone else. One of the best things about the DOZE beer club is becoming friends with other homebrewers, and everyone sharing their beer."

Along with fellow Diablo Order of Zymiracle Enthusiasts, or DOZE members, Feddersen participated in the Lafayette Park Hotel's first ever "Parktoberfest" recently. The group gets together once a month to discuss beer and

to invest in it. There is also a strong home brewing community that shares gadgets or equipment they've built themselves, which is great for those on a budget. I've built a couple of very useful items with parts from the hardware store." Although he has bottled in the past, and still had a healthy collection of bottles bearing unique names in the garage fridge like Bagpipers Holiday, Ugly Frau and Deadly Squirrel, Bernhardt prefers keeping beer in a keg - it's just easier. He estimates that he makes eight to ten batches per year, at five gallons per batch.

From ancient Egypt, 6,000 years ago, to Lamorinda today, who knew that malting, milling, mashing, lautering, boiling, fermenting and conditioning could taste so darn good - and make successful home brewers the most popular guys in the neighborhood?

To reach the Diablo Order of Zymiracle Enthusiasts, go to <http://clubdoze.com>. For more information on the Beer Judge Certification Program, go to www.bjcp.org. For more information on the Martinez Craft Beer Festival, go to www.bayareacraftbeerfestival.com.



Mike Bernhardt with his modified frigerator Photo Cathy Tyson



Boiling a yeast starter Photo Troy Feddersen



Inside the frigerator where the hoses go through the wall Photo Troy Feddersen

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

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