



Cheers!

BrewMasters Club joins the ranks of beer samplers

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Wine and champagne used to be the preferred beverages of the refined. Fine crystal was replaced by tankards when the economy tanked.

As salaries were lowered or eliminated, beer made a resurgence among those who, otherwise, would have been swilling more expensive forms of alcohol.

For two hours the first Wednesday evening of every month about 30 beer lovers gather at Sharp Edge Brasserie in Peters Township to taste and compare specialty beers. The group, which formed in late winter, is part of Pittsburgh BrewMasters, jokingly dubbed by cellerman Hart Johnson of PMC Pub Management Co. as "a social group with a drinking problem."

Christine Span is founder of the group, which has a database of more than 300 members. Different members conduct a taste test at the company's restaurant in Crafton on the third Wednesday of every month.

There are a few rules in the Pittsburgh BrewMasters club. No one is permitted to become intoxicated during the tasting and all must be age 21 years of age or older. A pre-selected theme is followed each tasting. The theme for September was hops.

Hopheads are grown on vines that yield a cone-shaped hops flower. Hops help in the removal of proteins and result in a clearer beer. It also may stave off spoilage.

For the true beer connoisseur, hops are the most beloved brewing ingredient and are often referred to as the spice of beer for adding bitterness, aroma and flavor.

Like so much else in life, the taste of beer is an individual preference. Span said she prefers a variety of domestic microbrews. Johnson likes pretty much every beer.

Johnson said each beer is ranked with an International Bitterness Unit (IBU). The higher the IBU score, the more bitter the taste.



Cellarman Hart Johnson pours a sampling of Wild Goose XPA during a Pittsburgh BrewMasters tasting.

Some beer tasters love high IBU rankings. Others compare the resulting flavor to "tasting hairspray."

The first taste during the Sept. 2 event was Wild Goose Extra Pale Ale. It received a collective "okay," a "three" and a "good warm-up beer."

Boulder Hazed and Infused, with its citrus taste, was rated by expert beer taster Jon Volkwein of North Strabane Township as "all shot, no soul."

Volkwein's a regular with his sampling friends Dave Yourd of Mt. Lebanon, Tom Busse of Bloomfield and Dennis Sweeney of Upper St. Clair Township. For them, the evening is as much a gathering for home-brewers as for tasting.

Volkwein has bee hives and decided home brewing was a good use for his abundance of honey.

Most participants during the test night liked Brewdog Hardcore IPA. This India Pale Ale is brewed in Great Britain and has a long shelf life, designed a century ago to ship to the English troops in India. It was well received with its 9 percent alcohol content.

BrewMasters is also about good company with those who enjoy sampling the more exotic, unique brews without paying for an entire bottle.

Pittsburgh BrewMasters keeps a running list of favorites among each month's samples. They hold an end-of-the-year celebration in which only the most liked beers are served.

To learn more about Pittsburgh BrewMasters, log on to www.pghbrewmasters.com.
Pre-registration for the monthly tasting is recommended.