

Local zymurgists 'hoppy' to convene monthly

By Lori Berkey
Contributing Writer

Shrewsbury - Joey Flournoy zealously talks about yeast and hops for hours on end. Finding someone equally zealous to listen to the discourse used to be difficult. That was until Flournoy joined the Worcester Incorporated Zymurgists Advancing Real Draughts (Wizards) homebrew club that meets monthly at Deja Brew in Shrewsbury. Now he basks in the joy of having like-minded home-brewers to swap ideas with and help each other make better beer. (Zymurgy is the branch of chemistry that deals with fermentation processes, such as those used in the brewing process.)

"We're brewers helping brewers," said Bill Nevits, who co-founded the Wizards in the late 1990s and who currently travels to the meetings from Hudson to serve as the club's secretary/treasurer.

According to Flournoy, the club meetings typically start with a toast of beer made by one of the members. The brewer tells how he or she made it, what techniques were used, and with what ingredients. Members give feedback about what they like or don't like about it. Feedback ranges from unsophisticated taste preferences to certified beer judges' tips for how to correct the beer's mouth feel.

The Wizards are made up of a wide range of brewers. Some participate because they like to make beer and taste beer. Others are into the math and science of it. Some like the technical side, the measuring. Some are extract brewers and some are all grain brewers.

"It's a mix," Flournoy said. "Some people never enter a competition; they have no interest in that. Others like to enter because they want to find out, 'how close did I hit that particular style?'"

If you made an IPA, is it the right style? Others will just make it and say, 'hey I like it,' and they'll drink it."

Flournoy likes the precision. He learned how to rate beer according to aroma, mouth feel, taste, body, and the overall rating, and he earned certification as a beer judge. In his role as the club's vice president, he enjoys the technical talk and what he learns from more experienced



Members of the Wizards homebrew club hoist a glass before a recent meeting at Deja Brew in Shrewsbury. Pictured (l to r) are Brian Girard, Greg Guyton, Pat Galvin, Bill Nevits, Dave Deroches, Joey Flournoy, Rob Cohane, Matt Juhascik, Miriam Morrison, Scott Morrison and Steve Jaskinski.

PHOTO: LORI BERKEY

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Brian Gerard

brewers. He also values the chance to mentor beginners and mingle with those who simply enjoy the pastime.

Brian Gerard, a member from Marlborough, joined as an extract brewer and advanced to all-grain brewing.

"As you do each batch you learn something new, and each problem you come across you learn from that and make the next beer better, so it's definitely a learning process," Gerard said, adding that he

likes the camaraderie of the club and the views offered.

During meetings, members also discuss upcoming local events, and plan club-based mini competitions. There's a question and answer period, where people can ask about dry hopping or boiling or anything else brew-related. Outside of meetings, members have fun touring local microbreweries together, attending brewers' festivals and exploring New England's

brewpubs.

Flournoy likens the craft to cooking.

"We like to make stuff, and I like this more than cake," he said.

Just as cooks add different ingredients for different

flavors, Flournoy has tried different combinations. Once he added lime, trying to make a Corona-style beer with the lime taste already in it. Another time he bought an old rum barrel and aged his beer in it.

The group has done different experiments where they all brewed with the same recipe, but everyone used a different kind of yeast and then tasted it to see what the different yeasts offered in terms of flavor. They've done the same using different hops.

Having stayed on since he co-founded the Wizards, Nevits is pleased with the club's diversity. Over the years, he said, he's met people from such varied professions that he wouldn't otherwise have had the chance to know.

The Wizards welcome aspiring brewers to experts alike. Anyone interested in joining is invited to show up the third Tuesday of the month at Deja Brew, 510B Boston Turnpike Road in Shrewsbury. For more information, visit www.brewbeer.org.

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