

Local Business

Patience pays off for Mantorville Brewing Company

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By Mike Dougherty
 Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN

MANTORVILLE - The road to finally putting six-packs of Mantorville Brewing Company's Stagecoach Ale in stores was about as bumpy as a stagecoach ride.

But Tod Fyten, owner of the brewery operation, says he's a patient man.

And that patience finally paid off.

Now beer drinkers in southeastern Minnesota, as well as the Twin Cities, will find the bottled brew at liquor stores. And more from the brewery, which will have a base in Mantorville, is in the works, too. Fyten said a golden ale and a smoked porter are in the near future under the Mantorville Brewing Company name.

"I'm bullish on local breweries," said Fyten of St. Paul. "This a place for local breweries and you have to know your place."

Greg Windschitl, brand manager of Schott Distributing in Rochester, agrees.

Schott's started deliveries of the Stagecoach Ale six packs last week to local liquor stores.

"We're seeing more and more local breweries with the craft and specialty beers," Windschitl said. "Even the big brewers are getting into it."

For Stagecoach, Windschitl said, the first appeal for consumers is likely the local nature of it. Then they'll decide on the taste.

"It's a local beer and we want to support that," he said.

Long trek

The brewing operation had been started in 1995 by six Mantorville area men, who were home brewers. Their brew showed up in kegs at area bars, but never it made it to market in bottles.

Fyten became a partner in the Mantorville Brewing Company in 1999 and purchased it from the remaining partners in 2002. Fyten planned to have it bottled at the August Schell Brewery in New Ulm, but that changed in 2002 when the Schell brewery bought the Grain Belt label.

The production of Grain Belt bumped contracts like Mantorville and St. Croix. Fyten moved production to a brewery in Black River Falls, Wis. That brewing operation was sold to Sand Creek Brewing, which caused further ripples in the industry.

At the same time, brewers were working with federal authorities on new labels and changes. Some of the federal oversight changed in recent years, so the regulators weren't as familiar with the brewers and the labels, which slowed the process, Fyten said.

Then when things were finally in place, Fyten developed heart problems from a virus that he'd caught, which sent him to the hospital, nearly dying, he said. So he was set back a year, which is where he finds himself now.

Mantorville's history

Fyten wants to tie the brewery with Mantorville's history. Over the past three years or so, he's assembled memorabilia pieces and equipment from past Mantorville breweries to house at the nearby brewer's house, an 1850s-era log cabin where the brewmaster made barrels for the brewery in his basement.

The Stagecoach Ale name is a nod to Mantorville's history as a stagecoach stop. The brewer's proximity to the old Ginsberg Brewery and the rest of Mantorville's National Historic District downtown area will help bring out more of the history, Fyten said.

As the small brewery gets re-established, Fyten is planning to open it for Saturday afternoon tours, hoping to capture some of the tourists in town, perhaps attracting a few more.

"With the history already in Mantorville and the efforts to build the bike trail through town, we think we'll help enhance all the things under way at Mantorville," Fyten said.

For now the beer will be brewed in Wisconsin, but some more specialty beers will likely be brewed in Mantorville, Fyten said.

"I'm just happy I'm alive and I stuck with it," he said recently during a visit to Rochester.

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Mantorville Brewing Company owner Tod Fyten shows off Stagecoach Ale, which is now available in liquor stores in southeastern Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

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