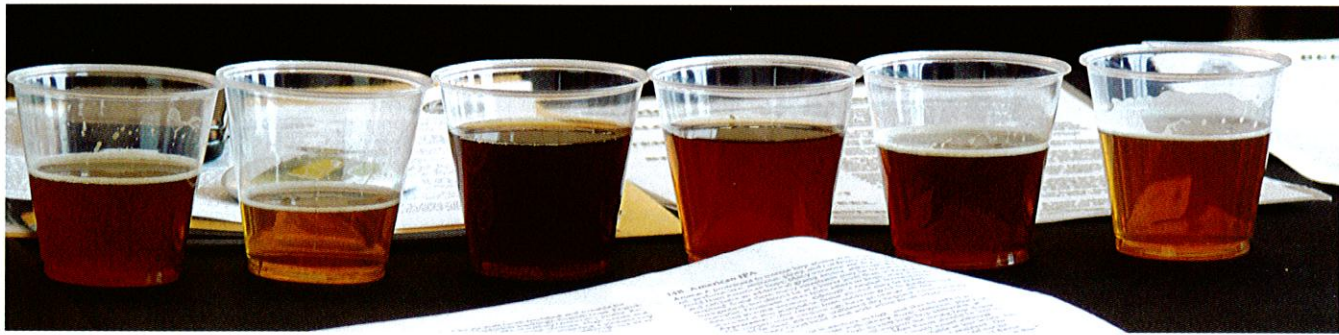


CRAFT BREWS AND ONTARIO HOPS: A winning combination

BY COURTNEY DENARD

Competition brings together some of the best craft brewers and local hop growers the province has to offer.



NOW IN ITS THIRD YEAR, The Great Ontario Hopped Craft Beer Competition continues to create a platform for brewers and growers to forge connections that will strengthen the industry.

Evan Elford, new crop development specialist with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and one of the competition's coordinators, says that's been the competition's main objective over the past three years.

"We want to establish new working relationships within the industry and give people the opportunity to realize that there are local hops grown right here at home," says Elford.

This mission was definitely accomplished at last year's competition!

The 2014 winning entry was the result of a partnership between The Blue Elephant Craft Brew House and Carolinian Hop Yard, both located in Simcoe, Ontario. The two businesses came together specifically to create their award winning ale.

Tim Wilson and Melanie Doerksen, owners of Carolinian Hop Yard, provided the hops, which were grown on their three-acre farm in Norfolk County without any chemical fertilizers, insecticides or herbicides.

The couple got into hop production in 2011 after buying a section of land from Tim's parents who have farmed in the area for years.

Carolinian Hop Yard currently grows 3,300 plants made up of nine different varieties of hops. The Nugget variety was last year's main hop and the perfect choice to offer Heather Pond and James Grant at The Blue Elephant.

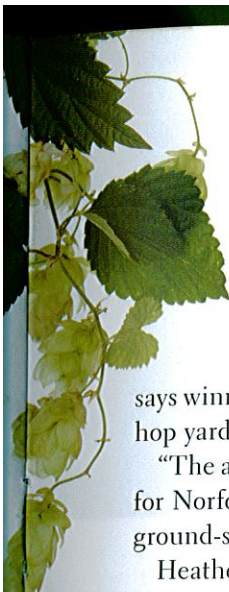
The Blue Elephant restaurant has been a Norfolk County hot spot for over two decades. In 2012, the pub decided to reinvent itself by building a microbrewery and began brewing Ontario craft beer right on-site.

In traditional European fashion, The Blue Elephant's beer is brewed in small batches with no additives or preservatives using only pure water, local organic barley, wheat, and hops.

Brewmaster James Grant creates fresh ales, lagers, pilsners and specialty brews all year long including Sweet Leaf Brown Ale, the winner of last year's Great Ontario Hopped Craft Beer Competition.

Winning the 2014 competition has meant different things for the partners.

Speaking on behalf of Carolinian Hop Yard, Doerksen



says winning gave her and Wilson the push to expand their hop yard and develop plans to grow to 4.5 acres in total.

“The award has also spawned us to be advocates not only for Norfolk County hops, but for the wider Ontario hops ground-swell,” Doerksen adds.

Heather Pond of The Blue Elephant says taking the first place award was a much-appreciated pat on the back.

“It was great to put a feather in the cap and give the restaurant some recognition and credit,” says Pond.

At the same time, all partners agree the competition is an excellent way to work together with those in the Ontario hops and craft beer-making sectors. The foursome enjoyed the experience so much; in fact, they’ve paired up again for the 2015 competition.

When asked what the judges can expect from last year’s reigning champions, Pond says it’s a secret but she does promise it will be a tasty treat.

Like every year, the 2015 Great Ontario Hopped Craft Beer Competition will include commercial brewers; hop producers and students in their graduating year of the accredited Ontario Brewmaster course.

This time round, the participants have been asked to develop a Porter style beer, which will be evaluated by a distinguished panel of judges.

The first place winner will be awarded the GOHCBC Bottomless Cup in their honour, as well as a permanent plaque to take home.

The 2015 Great Ontario Hopped Craft Beer Competition, sponsored by Gintec Shade Technologies, will take place on February 18th in the Scotiabank Centre’s Port Colborne Lounge from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. ■

