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LOCAL

Let the good times flow

By John Moorhouse

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When it comes to beer, canning lines aren't just for the big boys anymore.

Two Penticton micro-breweries have entered the canned beer business, just in time for the 11th annual Okanagan Fest-of-Ale which opens today at the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre.

The Cannery Brewing Company started its new canning line production Thursday with an initial run of Anarchist Amber beer, while the Barley Mill Brew Pub can barely keep up with demand for its own canned beers introduced last month.



Ron Dyck, co-owner of Cannery Brewing, said he's thrilled by the new line capable of canning 400 dozen beer in five hours.

The Barley Mill, which has been brewing its own beers for its pub since 1997, operates a manual canning line capable of producing up to 90 dozen beer in five hours.

Co-owner Kevin Hatfield said they have been asked by patrons, especially at the Fest-of-Ale, whether the Barley Mill has its brews available for off sales. Up until now it has only been available on tap for pub customers.

Both local brewers will be taking part in the two-day Fest-of-Ale, which is expected to attract up to 7,500 people. The festival, which features 28 micro-brewers and cider companies, runs today from 4 to 9 p.m. and Saturday from noon to 7 p.m.

Event co-ordinator Barb Sheppard said the event includes ongoing entertainment by a variety of groups. Back again is the popular Vancouver rock band Joe's Garage from Vancouver, with the closing act for this evening being the Fighting Urges. On Saturday it's Bobby Bruce as Nearly Neil (Diamond). Many of the visiting entertainers are also performing at other local venues this weekend.

Sheppard said the Fest-of-Ale's continuing popularity is also due to the number of restaurants that partner with the event.

"We want the brewers to have an opportunity to profile any new brew that they've produced," she said. "It's a spring event and a kickoff to the season for them."

As a non-profit organization, the Fest-of-Ale society donated \$20,000 to local charities last year, she added. A similar amount was directed to create an Okanagan Fest-of-Ale legacy fund through the Community Foundation of the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

Under the Safe Ride Home program sponsored by B.C. Government Liquor stores, festival tickets include a coupon good for \$3 off the cost of cab fare involving four local taxi firms.

No off-sales are available at the festival, but back on the canning line the Barley Mill and Cannery Brewing owners expect demand to grow for their brews.

Hatfield said being a brew pub, the Mill's capacity is limited by the storage space it has on premises. It has to meet the tastes of pub patrons and the market for canned beer at its adjoining liquor store.

"We've got to find a happy balance of what we can take out of our stock upstairs (in the brewing area) to can it," he said. "If the demand outpaces our supply, we're going to have beef up our supply – put in more storage."

Dyck admitted going to cans is a big step for Cannery Brewing. Traditional canning lines can cost anywhere from \$650,000 to \$1.4 million. The newly developed line the micro-brewery purchased from Cask Brewing Systems of Calgary costs less than \$200,000.

Dyck said the brewery plans to monitor the demand for cans of Anarchist Amber before deciding whether to expand the canning line to other brews.

“As soon as we find out what our volumes are going to be with the amber, we will put another of our beers into cans,” he said.

It will continue to sell brews in their large 650 ml bottles as well.

Photo: Terry Schoffer, brewer for Cannery Brewing Co., checks over the local micro-brewery's new canning line Thursday. All the suds from 28 breweries will be flowing on tap for the 11th annual Okanagan Fest-of-Ale today and Saturday at the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre.

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