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A match made in Sawyer

Fitzgerald's teams up with Greenbush Brewing to blend tastes of food and artisan microbrews

By JANE AMMESON - H-P Correspondent

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Taking the concept of being neighbors to a higher degree, Fitzgerald's of Sawyer and Greenbush Brewing Company do more than just borrow the occasional cup of sugar. Both businesses, located next door to each other in restored historic buildings in downtown Sawyer, are also collaborators, blending the tastes of food and artisan microbrews together to create great tastes.

"We not only serve many of their beers, we also cook with their beer," says David Hensrud, executive chef of Fitzgerald's.

Indeed, being able to go out one door and in another for handcrafted beer fits into the food philosophy of both Hensrud and Fitzgerald's owners Jim Schuman and Jo Webster.

"We try to use local and fresh ingredients as much as possible, including all of our produce and fruits," Hensrud says. "And getting foods that are as close to us as possible is important too. For example, during asparagus season, we went to Falak's Farm in Baroda to buy their asparagus, and what could be closer and fresher than asparagus grown two miles or so away?"

The answer to Hensrud's rhetorical question is beer just steps away.

"We're all foodies here," says Scott Sullivan, Greenbush's brewmaster and co-owner with childhood friend, Justin Heckathorn. "I started cooking when I was a kid, and so it means a lot to me when people say our beer pairs well with food."

But pairing beer or cooking with beer - even small batch beer individually produced - isn't necessarily an easy task.

"Our beer is not flavor neutral," Sullivan says. "Some breweries focus on a one certain style; we're all over the map."

So sometimes they get a little help from friends.

"We just had Danny Grant, the executive chef at RIA and Balsan, two restaurants at the Elysian Hotel in Chicago, come here to help develop a beer recipe to specifically pair with seafood," Sullivan says. "It's often hard to pair beer with seafood."

Collaborating with chefs in creating beer and food pairings is an exciting proposition, says Jill Sites, operations manager at Greenbush.

"We're doing a farm dinner at Seedling Fruit Farm in South Haven with owner Peter Klein and Stephanie Izard, owner of the Girl and the Goat restaurant in Chicago and the only woman to win Top Chef," Sites says. "Then she's coming here the day after the dinner to collaborate with Scott to create a beer."

Hensrud says that when he cooks such dishes as a barbecued pork butt using the microbrewery's Anger - a black India Pale Ale made with Belgian dark malts and dry-hopped for an intense aroma - or its Red Bud - the signature copper wheat ale with, what Sullivan describes as "an attitude of its own" - he takes into account how the different flavors will meld.

"We don't hide the flavor, we enhance it," he says. "You should treat the food as well as you can. You don't have to handle it that much, just get it in the door, show it some love and serve it. When I served brats cooked in Greenbush's Red Bud beer, I pair it also with a hot German potato salad because the two complement each other, giving it a very European kind of flavor."

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Like Sullivan, Hensrud started cooking young, though Sullivan is from Harbert (he and Heckathorn named the brewery Greenbush because that was Harbert's original name) and Hensrud grew up in North Dakota.

"Coincidentally Jim Schuman grew up just an hour from where I lived in North Dakota," Hensrud says, "but I never met him until I started working here."

Hensrud grew up in a Norwegian family, and his mother and grandmother taught him how to make traditional Norwegian foods. But primarily they instilled in him the connection to family and feelings that good cooking brings about.

"They were both great cooks," he says naming off a long list of Scandinavian foods they excelled at. "A couple of years ago there was a small uprising in the town my mother lives in because she stopped making lefse - a Norwegian potato flour bread that looks like a tortilla that you roll up and put jam in - to sell at Christmastime at her church. People were upset that they couldn't get Janet Sullivan's lefse, but it was just so labor intensive."

Using his home-taught skills, by the time Hensrud was 19 he was overseeing a kitchen of 40 people at a large hotel in North Dakota. From there, he moved to a restaurant development company where he opened numerous restaurants before segueing into being a project manager for the same company, overseeing the opening of hotels.

"It was a real good company, but I missed cooking," Hensrud says. "But I had three kids and needed the money."

Now the kids are grown and Hensrud and his wife moved to Sawyer, living in an apartment in the historic Flynn Theatre building just across the drive-way from Fitzgerald's. He walked into Fitzgerald's one day, and now he's the chef.

Sullivan's route into beer brewing came about after he hurt his hand doing woodworking and couldn't work for six weeks. He borrowed a friend's home beer-making kit and really got into making his own brew.

"The fourth batch we made was my porter, and people told me I should sell it," Sullivan says. "I thought that's a good way to make money."

And though Greenbush only opened its doors earlier this summer, word of mouth has been so tremendous that they completely sold out over the July Fourth weekend and are now doing nine times their volume.

As for pairing Greenbush beers, Sullivan says that the 1825 Belgian Strong goes well with summer vegetable dishes like ratatouille. The stronger seafood like salmon and scallops are a good match for the Dunegrass IPA, and the Porter is perfect for braising dishes and Sullivan uses it when cooking ribs. Sites says she like to spike her chili with the Anger Black IPA.

"I made a great Belgian Carbonade using Retribution," says Sullivan about the classic beef and beer stew, "which is a Belgian hybrid that has a lot of flavor."

Fitzgerald's Beer Boiled Brats in Red Bud Beer

24 ounces Red Bud Beer

1 pound brats

Boil brats in Red Bud beer for 20 minutes and place over red hot coals two to three minutes per side until nicely browned.

Fitzgerald's Hot German Potato Salad

2 cups cooked, peeled, diced potatoes

1/2 cup mayonnaise

1 teaspoon stone ground mustard

1 tablespoon olive oil

1/4 cup bacon, cooked, drained and chopped

2 scallions, chopped

2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

Combine all ingredients in a baking dish and mix thoroughly. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes or until golden brown.

Fitzgerald's Barbecued Pork Butt

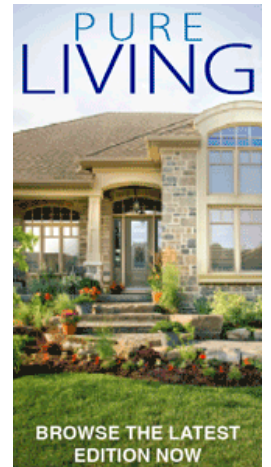
1 pork butt

24 ounces Anger beer

Salt and pepper

Place pork in a pan and cover with beer, marinade over night. Remove it, drain, salt and pepper. Place over hot charcoal and immediately place a couple of pecan wood chips that have been soaked in water on the hot charcoal.

Cook for six to eight minutes until nicely browned. Flip and cook an additional six to eight minutes. Slide roast off of direct heat and cook indirectly for 2 1/2 to 3 hours on very low heat. Serve either warm or cold.



Serve with Anger beer.

Fitzgerald's Beer Battered Fish

1 pound skin-on black cod, cut into one inch strips

2 cups flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 tablespoon salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

9 to 10 ounces Mad Hatter beer (Sunspot from Greenbush can also be used)

Vegetable oil

Whip five ingredients starting with flour, until well blended. Put two inches of vegetable oil in a deep pan and bring to medium high heat until oil is bubbly. Once the oil is hot, dip the fish in the batter and slowly lower into the oil. Cook six to seven minutes flipping it once until golden brown.

Serve with Greenbush Sunspot beer.

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