



A Fire Built by Angels

by Cyril R. Videgar, beerscoop@gmail.com

Kendall Andrews and her daughter Emily recently found themselves thirsty abroad. In Belize this year, they discovered how scarce craft beer is outside the United States, and how much its absence changed their experience. "It's part of what we expect to find when we go out to eat or travel," said Kendall.

Returning from Belize's cays with an unslacked thirst for artistic local ales, Kendall and Emily were quick to jump at the chance to make their own craft beer at 300 Suns brewery this fall with the Colorado Barley Angels (www.barleysangelscolorado.com).

During October and November, the Barley Angels club organized four premier pro-am brewing sessions for members to brew holiday beers of their own design under the guidance of professional brewers like Mark Lusher of 300 Suns (Longmont Area Chamber of Commerce 2014 Rookie business of the year). Other collaborating breweries include J. Wells, Former Future, and Kokopelli. "Sometimes, the best way for craft beer fans to learn about beer is to make their own," said Colorado Barley Angels chapter founder Deb Cameron.

The holiday brewing program furthers the mission of the Barley Angels to create educational opportunities for women to engage craft beer. It also highlights the enduring community integration of American craft beer, from its bounty of products to the community support and identity local brewers provide.

On October 20, the 300 Suns brewing adventure began with a crash course in brewing on-site at 335 First Ave, Longmont. The Barley Angels group then followed Lusher into the 10 bbl brewhouse to become familiar with the equipment and space where they would return to brew in November.

After learning to distinguish a hot liquor tank from a mash tun, the group retired to the tap room for tastings and recipe planning. Broad flavor preferences abounded, as they struggled to design a beer to pair with all Thanksgiving meal courses. Red hue. Cloves, earthy grain profile, background hops with 20-30 IBUs, sessionable (under 6% ABV), citrus notes, umami, and myriad other wedges of the flavor wheel flew about.

Lusher's vast knowledge of hop characters helped the group narrow in on three hops: Willamette for bright aroma,

and Challenger and Northern Brewer for background bitterness. But the style remained elusive. As the sun sank below the horizon October 20, the group broke apart for the evening. Lusher then crunched the flavor preferences and flights of fancy into an amber-hued American Wheat recipe (BJCP style 6D), incorporating citrus notes from a post-boil addition of orange peels.

November 8, armed with a recipe and 470 pounds of wheat and barley, Lusher welcomed back the Barley Angels to brew their unnamed beer. That was fine with Lusher though. "Sometimes we taste a beer before we name it here," he told the group, while they alternated pouring the nine fifty-pound grain bags into the mash tun.

Over the following hours, the group shared the labor of the mash, lauter, and wort transfer processes. The most interesting of which for Marie Fox and Heather Kirkwood, both homebrewers in the group, was the Vorlauf, where steeped grains are rinsed with first runnings (initial malt sugar-enriched pre-boil wort) for 15 minutes to filter out husks and large grain material from the wort.

The organic filtering was followed by a 188 degree F water sparge to rinse remaining malt sugars from the grains before the batch entered the kettle and its 90-minute boil.

As the boil built and rolled, and the embers of the brew day faded, Lusher marshaled the group toward a name for their steaming holiday ale. They coalesced around an homage to Longmont's agricultural past and the warmth of holiday cheer: Mill Fire Wheat. A name also offering a geographic connection to the city's lost flour mill that stood footsteps from the 300 Suns brewery. The fire borne of the Angels now had a name, as it entered the fermenter.

On November 23, the Barley Angels will return to 300 Suns to release their Mill Fire Wheat. Come down to hear stories of their process from the Andrews, Fox, Kirkwood, Elizabeth Mayne, and the other brewers. "It's one thing to hear a brewer talk about the process, but when a beer fan can experience this first hand, it lends a whole new dimension to her understanding," said Deb Cameron, who can be reached at barleysangelscolorado@gmail.com for more details.