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Local seniors brew ales at home

By Becca Gregg, Sentinel Reporter, March 18, 2010 Mar 18, 2010

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Drew Kendall, director of dining at The Bridges at Bent Creek in Silver Spring Township, pours a taste of different types of beers they have made in the Homebrewing Club. *Jason Malmont/The Sentinel*

At his age, Marty Haverstock knows a good beer when he tastes one.

Growing up during the Prohibition period of the late 1920s, the now 93-year-old Haverstock said he earned extra money by delivering moonshine to a secret location behind the Dauphin County Courthouse.

“Them moonshiners, they thought police would never suspect (a kid),” Haverstock says. “I got myself almost the whole way through high school peddling that moonshine.”

Adds friend Edgar Patterson, also 93, “At the time, it was a rather common thing. You always wondered why kids in your gang had a couple extra bucks in their pocket. They’d borrow dad’s car and go up to Perry County and haul some down to Harrisburg.”

However, Haverstock said his illegal after-school doings came to an abrupt end one night in the early 1930s, in the basement of his parents’ Lemoyne home.

“I got the bright idea, why should I be the middleman? I tried to make some, but I didn’t know what I was doing,” he recalls. “I made two batches and I don’t know whether I got greedy or not, but I made another batch and blew up the basement. I bottled it, but should’ve let it sit longer. By three in the morning, it exploded. It’s a good thing I wasn’t in the basement. There was glass sticking to everything,” Haverstock laughs, before adding “That was the end of my moonshining.”

At-home ale

Today, both Haverstock and Patterson prefer to ferment their alcohol the legal way.

Both are members of a new homebrew club offered to residents at The Bridges of Bent Creek, an assisted living community on Bent Creek Boulevard in Silver Spring Township.

Started by Dining Services Director Andrew Kendall in late 2009, the group meets once a month in a dining room at The Bridges, where members learn about different types of beer and the facets of brewing them, in addition to the step-by-step brewing process. For residents who prefer non-alcoholic beverages, the group brews soda and birch beer. Upon completion, the finished product is bottled and shared with residents and visitors.

“It started off with just a couple who were interested,” Kendall says, adding that the group has since increased to about 12-15 members. “It seems to be a pretty big hit among the residents.”

To date, the club has brewed a variety of different beers, including apricot amber, oatmeal stout, honey wheat and a version of Blue Moon.

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The entire brew process takes 20-35 days, explains Kendall, adding that it all begins with a kit that can be ordered online.

Residents take part in every step, including bottling the finished product themselves.

“It’s something that some are more interested in, but may be scared to bring it up because people might look down at (drinking) alcohol,” Kendall says of the success of the homebrew club. “They’re actually brewing it, rather than just sitting around drinking

it. It gives them something that they enjoy doing.”

Beyond beer

According to Grace Zarnas-Hoyer, a spokeswoman for Cura Hospitality, a group that runs dining services for assisted living facilities like Bent Creek, the homebrew club at The Bridges is part of a bigger movement that’s beginning to be seen in senior living communities throughout the country.

“Culture change in assisted living and long-term care is basically going away from a medical environment and going with a more home-like atmosphere. They’re creating these communities to be more home-like and replicate what (residents) did in their homes,” she says, adding that the movement can be seen through on-site gardening clubs where residents can cultivate their own food, as well as kitchen table-style meals, sans trays.

'Something to do'

For many residents, the homebrewing club at The Bridges is a welcome break from the standard knitting, cooking and crafts clubs offered by most senior communities.

“Our brew club also lends itself to an activity our male residents enjoy and used to do prior to moving to the Bridges,” Kendall says.

Resident Stanley Bingham, 85, agrees.

“I used to brew beer when I was in the service during World War II,” Bingham recalls, adding “I enjoy the club, it gives me something to do.”