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owners expect to open soon
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STARTING OFF SMALL
Bonsai Brewing tucked in
corner of Whitefish mall
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FBJ Flathead Business Journal

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Tapping into the future

**Craft-beer industry in
Northwest Montana
continues to grow**



WHEATFISH LAGER is one of the flagship beers of the Great Northern Brewing Company in Whitefish. This beer was awarded the silver medal at the Great American Beer Festival, the nation's largest beer festival held annually in Denver. (Brenda Ahearn/Flathead Business Journal)

KALISPELL BREWING COMPANY



MAGGIE DOHERTY and Cole Schneider discuss the progress of Kalispell Brewing Company recently. The business is slated to open in late spring/early summer. (Patrick Cote/Flathead Business Journal)

Brewery expects to open soon

By RYAN MURRAY
Flathead Business Journal

It'll be worth the wait, say Maggie Doherty and Cole Schneider, owners of Kalispell Brewing Company.

Founded in 2012, the long-awaited opening of Kalispell's very own brewery is just a few short weeks away, according to the brew gurus. Setbacks and delays have kept the brewery from its initial proposed opening during the summer of 2013.

"Construction is almost done," Doherty said in early April. "We plan to finish this week."

The sluggish permitting process, along with the challenges of renovating a nearly 100-year-old building, plus inclement weather, have left the construction process behind schedule. On April 21, the brewers were finally approved by the city of Kalispell to brew.

'NO ONE delay held us up for more than a few weeks. It was weather, slow deliveries, asbestos removal from the old building; I just really want to brew.'

♦ Cole Schneider

"No one delay held us up for more than a few weeks," Schneider said. "It was weather, slow deliveries, asbestos removal from the old building; I just really want to brew."

All the brewing equipment is ready to go, he said. Kalispell Brewing Company is waiting on permits, but the grain is just waiting for a brewer's touch.

"I could put grain in today and have wort by the end of the day," Schneider said. "It takes four or five weeks to brew a beer, so we are hoping to be open by the end of May or early June."

The wort (pronounced wurt) is the liquid mash from the grains that contains the sugars which will ferment into alcohol.

Kalispell Brewing plans to use a 10-barrel brewing system in its 6,000-square foot production floor. The attached tasting room — including the balcony overlooking Kalispell's Main Street with a view of the Swan Mountains — will have 3,000 square feet for patrons to enjoy brews.

The brewery will employ nine or 10 servers and plans to serve

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Acquisition of equipment next step in hops trial

By LYNNETTE HINTZE
Flathead Business Journal

The next big step in a five-year hops variety trial under way near Whitefish is to get the harvesting and processing equipment.

Tom Britz, a Whitefish area rancher whose property is being used for the hops trial, and Pat McGlynn, the Montana State University agriculture extension agent for Flathead County, recently were in Helena to testify in support of a grant proposal for the needed equipment.

Last week the Montana Department of Agriculture's Growth Through Agriculture program awarded the hops trial a \$42,000 grant for this second phase.

"This is the single largest grant they are giving out this year," McGlynn said. "Now we are waiting for the USDA Rural Development answer on the grant for the other \$45,000."

Getting the harvesting and processing equipment in place is a monumental step, she said. The closest hops harvester is located in the Yakima, Wash. area.

"The dilemma is that people [growing hops] have gotten to this point over and over again. To do the harvest by hand is too difficult," McGlynn said. "The hops need to be dehydrated and packaged."

McGlynn and Britz envision a regional growers cooperative to use commercial harvest, processing and packaging equipment. Commercial hops production is both capital- and labor-intensive and the infrastructure for harvesting and processing doesn't exist anywhere in Montana.

The harvester they intend to purchase is a five-ton machine that would be shipped from Germany.

Britz has been working with the Extension Service in Vermont to get a design for a drying unit. He's also been getting hop varieties from around the world — from New Zealand to Mexico — to try growing here.

"They all have different aroma flavors," McGlynn said. "The industry is not looking for the same old, same old, but for certain tastes and aromas. Micro-breweries want more complex hops."

Close to three dozen varieties will be in the ground by the end of spring, she said.

The hops trial began last year when Britz was looking for niche opportunities for his ranch acreage that historically has been used for hay and pasture. Britz and McGlynn collaborated on the trial, with Britz doing much of the leg work, meeting with the Montana Brewers Association and local craft brewers.

The consensus among brewers was that they'd love to have access to Montana-grown hops.

"The local brewers are very excited," McGlynn said.

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KALISPELL (continued from page 1)

beer seven days a week from noon to 8 p.m. Beers will be served in 12-ounce glasses specific to the style. For example, the Two Ski Brewski Pilsner will be served in a stemmed pils glass and the Winter at Noon Dunkel in a dimpled glass mug.

“The glassware really does affect the

flavor and the aroma,” Doherty said. “Beer is kind of the everyman’s drink. It’s really like a marriage of science and art.”

Kalispell Brewing Company plans on opening with several lagers — beers that are top-fermented and considered more difficult to brew than ales. Bay-

ern Brewing in Missoula is one other Montana brewery that focuses heavily on the subtler lager styles.

“We are opening with five beers on tap,” Schneider said. “Everybody brews ales. Everyone focuses on extremes, and subtle, well-balanced beers are harder to find.”

The brewery plans on using golden Montana grains and Northwest hops. The Cloudcroft IPA, for example, will feature CTZ, Chinook, Summit and Cascade varieties of hops.

The large building on Main Street, which used to be a car dealership, leaves plenty of room to grow.

Doherty and Schneider plan to offer the 12-ounce pours for \$3 each, and growler fills for \$9. With \$2 million already sunk into the project, the owners are excited to open and start pouring.

“We got married during this process,” Doherty said. “Some people get divorced over a kitchen remodel. If we can stay together, that’s a good sign. Beer is our passion.”



Beer buzz

110,273

JOBS In the United States created by craft brewers

15.6 million

BARRELS OF BEER produced by craft brewers in 2013

14.3 billion

Craft brewer **RETAIL DOLLAR VALUE** in 2013

2,822

NUMBER OF BREWERIES that operated in the U.S. for some or all of 2013, the highest total since the 1870s

196.2 million

BARRELS OF BEER sold in the United States in 2013

27.5 million

BARRELS OF imported beer sold in U.S. in 2013

18 percent

GROWTH of craft brewing industry in 2013

6.7 percent

PERCENTAGE of the 200 million barrels of beer made by craft brewers and consumed in the U.S. in 2012

No. 3

MONTANA’S RANKING in population capita per brewery in 2012; Vermont was first, and Oregon was second.

40

LICENSED BREWERIES in Montana

6 million

POUNDS OF malted grain used by Montana breweries annually

Source: Brewers Association, Montana Brewers Association

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BONSAI BREWING PROJECT

Thinking small brings big results

By AARIC BRYAN
Flathead Business Journal

Even though the Bonsai Brewing Project has only been open for a couple of months, a lot of people in the Whitefish area have been tasting the beer for years.

"I used to throw block parties and give away a lot of my beer, so I have a pretty good reputation around town," Graham Hart said with a smile as he poured a bucket of hops into a batch of Due North RPA at the brewery's taproom in the Whitefish Mountain Mall in early April.

Hart relied on this reputation to finally realize his five-year-long dream of opening a nano-brewery in his hometown. Though he saved all the money he could, bought most of the equipment secondhand and invested nearly \$35,000 of his savings; it was the pledges of \$17,803 he received from 68 backers during his Kickstarter campaign that made it possible to open the taproom on Jan. 2.

Hart keeps five regular ales on tap: Lil Blond Honey, Initiation Ale, Due North RPA, Sheriff John Brown and The Unkindness Stout. Hart, who started by making home brew before going to a Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.'s beer camp and later working as an assistant brewer at Tamarack Brewing Company, also has three taps to "mess around with" for seasonal beers.

"There's some people that have their one beer and they don't want anything else," Hart said, explaining why he keeps the same five ales on tap. "And



GRAHAM HART, the owner and brewer of the Bonsai Brewing Project, sits in the brewery's tap room in the Whitefish Mountain Mall this month. (Aaric Bryan/Flathead Business Journal)

then there's people like me who like to try everything I can and like to see what else is out there."

The brewery's small size — Bonsai is a four-barrel brewhouse with each barrel at 31 gallons — allows Hart to experiment with his seasonal beers. If he makes a mistake or a beer he's not satisfied with, because of the small size of the batch it's not going to bankrupt

him. More importantly, the brewery's small size promises a quick turnaround.

"Fresh beer is the best beer," Hart said. "A batch of beer here only lasts a month and since we don't bottle any of it, it never gets old."

Not bottling the beer also cuts down on waste.

"You're refilling a glass every time

'FRESH BEER is the best beer. A batch of beer here only lasts a month and since we don't bottle any of it, it never gets old.'

♦ *Graham Hart*

you come back versus throwing six bottles and a piece of cardboard away or trying to recycle them, but even recycling takes more energy than reusing," Hart said.

Hart plans to brew around 300 barrels a year and hopes to increase to 500 barrels soon, which would be about the maximum for Bonsai's mall location. Business has been steady since the opening and Hart sees the potential of growing to 1,000 barrels someday, but not in the near future.

No matter how big Bonsai grows, Hart said he will always be the same person who liked to throw block parties and have people taste his beer.

"I'll get as big as I need to as long as I can stay focused on having fun in Whitefish and having fun in the Flathead Valley," Hart said. "Breweries are usually a manufacturing business. I don't want to be in the manufacturing business. I want to be in the entertainment business."

People can be entertained at the Bonsai Brewing Project Wednesday through Friday from 3 to 8 p.m. and on Saturday from noon to 8 p.m.

HOPS (continued from page 2)

The hops at Britz's place was harvested by hand last fall.

"It was so small, I was really surprised we had enough to do a beer tasting," McGlynn said, adding that 17 varieties were used in 23 different craft beers.

Nearly all commercially grown hops in the United States are produced in Washington, Oregon and Idaho, though other states recently have begun studying small-scale production because of craft brewers who prize locally pro-

duced ingredients.

Great Northern Brewing Co. in Whitefish and Tamarack Brewing Co. in Lakeside helping to sponsor the hops trials.

The hops research will involve surveying craft brewers to determine the most popular of more than 100 varieties. Test varieties of hops are grown on trellis systems.

Data is being collected on survivability, vigor, production quality and quantity, and start-up costs.

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