

Cape class helps students become beer brewers

By ERIC SCOTT CAMPBELL Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, January 17, 2010 |

CAPE MAY — John and Nancy Roche’s last foray into home fermentation, in the 1970s, yielded a batch of red wine that made a far more lasting impression on their gold carpet than their palates.

When their son got a home beer-brewing kit this Christmas just before leaving to do six months of nonprofit work in South Africa, they resolved to learn how to use it in time for his return.

So the Margate couple headed south Sunday to a “beer class” at the Mad Batter, a restaurant they had never visited. The experience was new for Mark Kulkowitz, too. Kulkowitz’s Jackson Street establishment has held successful wine classes before, and he recently decided to expand into beer education.

Kulkowitz turned to Jon Davies, his former chef and current Atlantic Cape May Community College professor, to teach two dozen people the basics of how to brew beer at home.

Depending on the mix of barley, water, yeast and hops, home brewing “can be as simple or as difficult as you’d like to make it,” Davies said, as attendees perused recipes. Brewing kits usually include bottles, fermenting containers and ingredients.

Don’t fudge on the ingredients, Davies warned the class. Don’t use a slightly different item, use it at the wrong time or use the wrong amount. Davies recalled, years ago, confidently adding an amount of sugar that ended up making his bottles explode in the middle of the night.

“All of a sudden, it sounded like machine-gun fire,” Davies lamented as the class chuckled.

The Grolsch brand of beer, whose bottle opens and closes with a metal latch, is especially popular among home brewers who want to reuse bottles, Davies said. The class and the teachers sampled Grolsch and four other beers as they talked.

“I feel no pain. I’ve forgotten the Giants aren’t playing football anymore!” joked Kulkowitz, whose favorite team missed the playoffs this year.

John Roche, a retired engineer, asked Davies how cold beer should optimally be. It depends on the type, Davies replied — ales ferment at a higher temperature than lagers — but most are best enjoyed at about

50 degrees, warmer than recommended refrigerator settings.

The Roches plan to bring friends to the next session, a seminar on pairing beer with cheese, and they'll try to find a suitable brewing headquarters.

"I think in our little Marven Gardens house it's going to be a challenge," said Nancy Roche, "finding a place cool enough to bottle for two weeks in the summer."

If you go

The Mad Batter Beer School will have seven more sessions in 2010, all 2 p.m. Sundays: Feb. 14, March 21, April 25, Sept. 19, Oct. 17, Nov. 21 and Dec. 19. The \$25 per-class fee includes snacks and five 4.5-ounce beer samples. For more information, call the restaurant at 609-884-5970.

Home brewing, by the numbers

750,000: Estimated U.S. home brewers in 2009

800: Home-brew clubs

300: Home-brewing competitions held each year

5,166: Entries in the 2009 AHA National Homebrew Competition

Source: American Homebrewers Association

Home brewing, on the Web

American Homebrewers Association: homebrewersassociation.org

The Home Brewery, a retailer and supplier: homebrewery.com

Home Brew Talk, a discussion forum: homebrewtalk.com

Contact Eric Scott Campbell:

609-272-7227

ECampbell@pressofac.com

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