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Brewtherville Labs

Lutherville's own Home Brewing Club

Brewtherville Labs: Local Home Brews

Insight into a local club that specializes in home brewing.

by Kayla Bawroski
Editor

What do you get by mixing grains, hops, water and time? Beer, of course! Okay, it might not have been that obvious, at least not to people not familiar with the basics of home brewing. But luckily for people in the Lutherville area who are interested in home brewing, but don't know where to start, there is a local club quickly gaining traction and attention.

Aptly and cleverly named Brewtherville Labs, the club was just officially created in January 2013 and by the end of May already had roughly 40 members, according to founding member Michael Heitt. Heitt started the club with his friend, Stephen "Stewie" Kinsey and neighbor, Gibbs Burke.

It started when Kinsey and Heitt were asked to brew beer for a mutual friend's annual Fourth of July party, which turned into a friendly competition. So friendly, Heitt added, that during a competition when the time came for him to force carbonate the beer and he was out of CO₂, Kinsey gladly let Heitt use some of his own supply.

Now, with almost 40 members, the club has already had two big brew days in addition to monthly meeting, and they went to the National Homebrew Conference in Philadelphia in June, according to Heitt.

At the conference, Heitt said they were planning on going all out with the lab theme that initially started with the club's name, Brewtherville Labs.

What is Brewtherville?

Kinsey and Heitt came up with the name Brewtherville Labs because both of their children went to the local elementary school, right on York Road, called Lutherville Labs, Heitt said. Plus, both of them are somewhat involved in that type of lab field, with Heitt as a psychologist and Kinsey as a molecular biologist.

Along with the lab theme, Heitt said at the conference they planned on wearing lab coats, having beakers on the table when dispensing beer and using 100ml beakers with their logo etched



This is a diagram of the brewing process, with the Brewtherville Labs' logo in the center. Brewing starts by adding hot water and grain to a cooler, then transferring that to another tank and adding yeast, putting it through two fermentation processes and finishing it up in a keg.

Photo courtesy of Brewtherville Labs

on it as a tasting glass for members.

"We're going with our lab theme, which is kind of cool," he added.

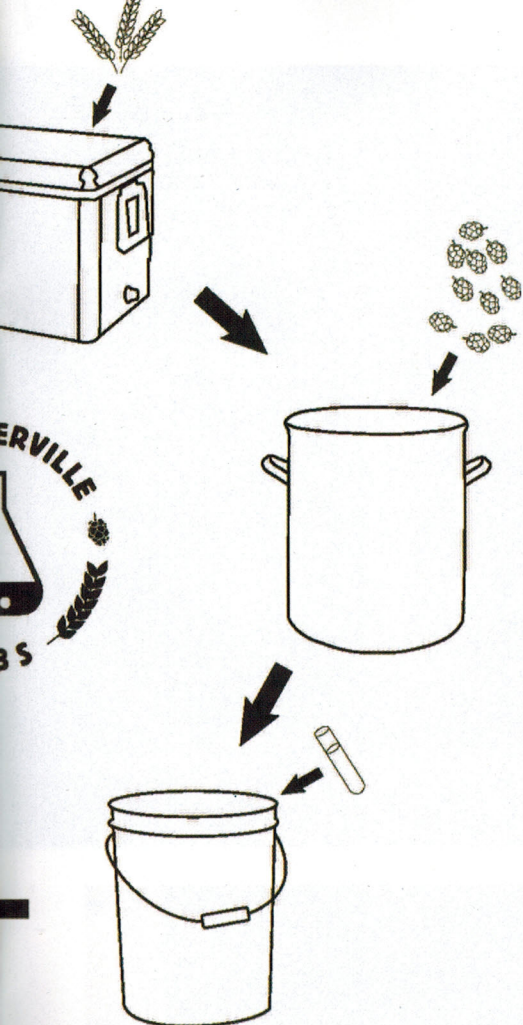
Don't let the theme – or their careers – intimidate you from joining with the Brewtherville Labs or starting up your own homebrewing operation. It's much easier than it looks and Heitt wrote in an e-mail that the club has attracted a wide variety of people since they began.

Some members are in their 60s, other as young as their 20s, and there are even a few women in the club, which Heitt suggested is "pretty uncommon."

"We have people who have never brewed before and others who have brewed for decades," he wrote. "We've got attorneys, physicians, a psychologist, engineers, a molecular biologist, a rabbi, IT professionals, recent grads and more.

"And all are welcome, you just need to be interested in learning about beer and beer brewing, but you don't have to want to brew yourself," he added.

Heitt is one of those members who have been brewing for



quite a while, although in the beginning, he admitted he wasn't very good. He started in the early 90s and that was before the Internet and handy YouTube tutorials.

Plus, Heitt said the quality of ingredients and equipment available at the time wasn't that good and he didn't understand the "importance of sanitation."

"I brewed a few beers," he said, adding that the first one turned out "drinkable" but another was "horrible" and despite his natural inclination to avoid wasting anything, he threw out five gallons of beer.

After that, Heitt said he started reading more about the process, watching tutorials and talking to other people. Along the way the quality of the ingredients has dramatically improved and thus, the end product has improved.

Even still, Heitt said every time he brews he still makes a mistake whether it is with the measurements or adding something too late, but now, he knows how to correct it. Sometimes, he just waits to see how something will turn out.

"I haven't had any beers that I didn't like," he said.

This even includes a peppermint patty beer Heitt said he brewed after a friend asked him what he'd rather be stranded on a desert island with – beer or his favorite candy, peppermint patties. With that in mind, Heitt brewed a beer with peppermint tea leaves and cocoa powder and even though it wasn't his

favorite beer, he said it "turned out OK."

Those novelty beers aren't his thing, Heitt added, but in the past, some of his mistakes have turned into beers that he and his peers greatly enjoy.

One of these mistakes includes when he brewed a beer at a temperature of 148 degrees, as opposed to his typical 152 degrees. It actually turned out into an "incredible tasting beer" that was also high in alcohol content.

People loved that one so much so that Heitt planned on brewing it for a fundraiser for his son, who goes to a private school. The school did a silent auction, but as a psychologist, Heitt said he couldn't offer his services. Instead, he offered to brew a keg for someone or teach them how to brew.

The keg ended up selling for \$245 and Heitt planned on teaching a few people how to brew the pale ale he mistakenly made in the past. That particular beer and another recipe are Heitt's two "house recipes," the other being a wheat beer that he brewed for a few parties.

The wheat beer was inspired from Boulevard Beer, a Kansas City brewing company. Heitt's wife is from Kansas City and when they went back to Missouri to visit, he would always get Boulevard Beer, which isn't distributed on the East Coast.

With that in mind, Heitt wrote to the company and asked for a recipe for their filtered wheat beer so he could brew his own version back home. The company obliged, sending along a one line recipe that he had to convert from a 900 gallon batch to a five gallon batch.

He added orange zest and orange juice and, according to Heitt, "people loved it."

Recently, Heitt returned to the brewery and found that they had added hops to the beer, which is a rarity in wheat beer. So he altered his own recipe to reflect that.

"I added some summit hops and it turned out wonderfully," he said. "I'm going to be brewing that more often."

The other members have their own typical recipes too, including Kinsey's Irish red ale, which the club has brewed several times, each time experimenting along the way to see how minor changes would affect the brew.

Typically, the club brews ales, as opposed to lagers, which Heitt said require cooler fermentation temperatures and much longer fermentation times, at least compared to brewing ales. Another difference is the type of yeast used, plus Heitt added that he thinks the ale yeast has an interesting aroma, "whereas lager yeasts are cleaner."

If the brew lingo blew over your head, Heitt happily explained the brew process more in depth.

Fermentation? Yeast?

The brewing process isn't nearly as complicated as one would think, especially with extract brew kits. Heitt compared the all grain brewing process to that of making cookies from scratch and the extract process – which involves pre-made syrup – to using a Betty Crocker mix.

Because he makes a five gallon batch at a time, Heitt brews his beer outside with a propane tank and on brew day, probably spends about four-to-six hours out there, including the start up and clean up. At the start, Heitt adds hot water to crushed grain in a cooler and steeps it for an hour, basically making a

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From top: The inside of one of the coolers club members use in the home brewing process, plus a club member at work during the home brew process.

A shot of the whole club, which joined together for a big brew day a few months ago, and a photograph of some of the ingredients used in the home brewing process, including hops and other miscellaneous items.

At the bottom is a photo of founding member Michael Heitt with Charlie Papazian, founder of the Association of Brewers. In the brewing process, Heitt and other all-grain brewers use milled grain, such as the grain in the photographed pot, to start the beer brewing process.

Finally, a shot of of the brewing process, mid-boil.

Photos courtesy of Brewtherville Labs

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porridge.

“During that one hour process that particular temperature of hot water will activate enzymes to break down starches into simple sugars,” he said.

After you add the hops, the sugar water becomes what is called the wort. That is the liquid that brewers put into a fermenter, add yeast to, and a week later, you have beer. Along the way, brewers can add specialty grains and experiment with yeast and hops to change the flavor, Heitt added.

Adding hops at the beginning of the boil, for example, causes a more bitter flavor and waiting until the end will result in more aroma, according to Heitt.

For the extract method, Heitt said you boil water, pout the syrup in, add hops, yeast and ferment, basically skipping the first step of using hot water to activate an enzyme. The main thing he stressed was sanitation.

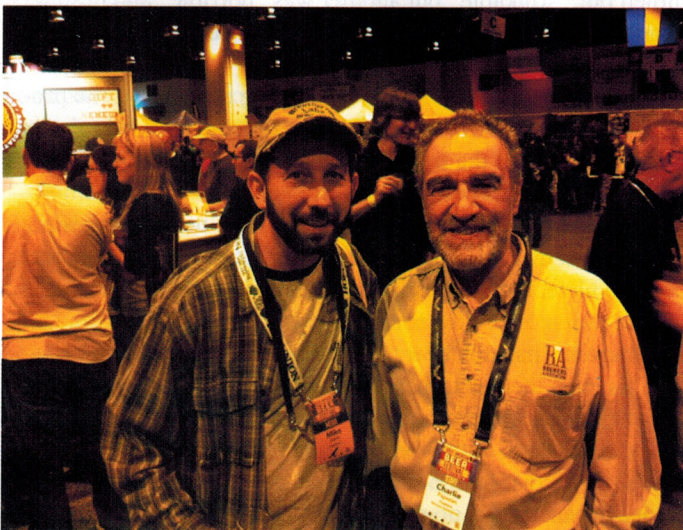
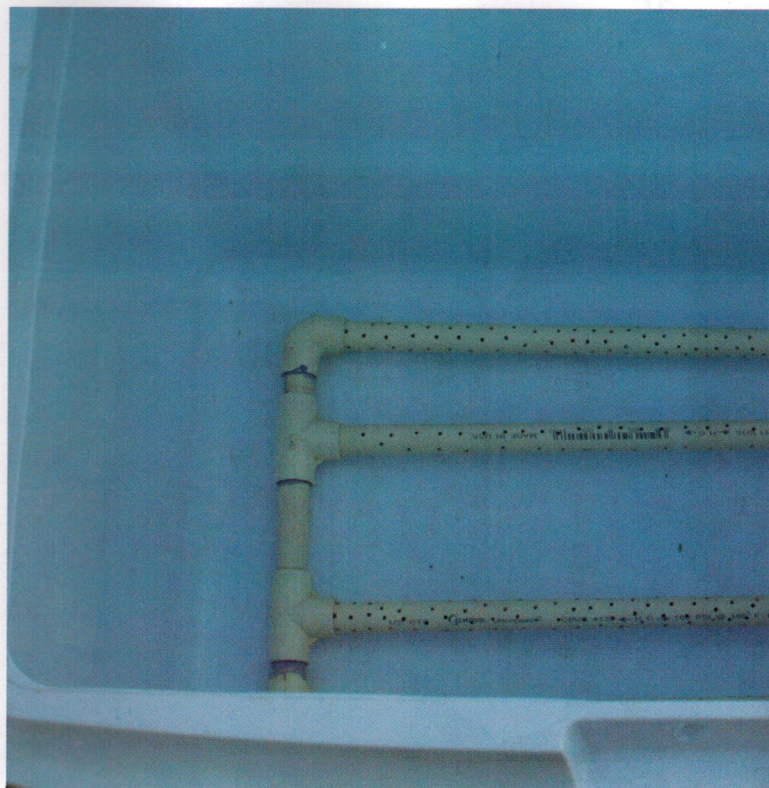
Special cleaning supplies are needed to get rid of contaminants in anything that touches the beer after the boiling process. This includes the tubes, testing equipment and even the container you put the beer in, which can be a keg or bottles.

If home brewers use a keg and force carbonate quickly, with a CO2 tank, Heitt said the beer can be drank later that day, but if they force carbonate more slowly, they will need to wait a week. If they package the beer in bottles, he added that they would need to add more sugar, put the bottles in a warm spot and let it sit another couple of weeks before it's ready.

“It's actually quite easy,” Heitt added. “What they say is if you know how to boil water then you know how to brew beer.”

Besides, luckily for local residents, the Brewtherville Labs club is open for anyone to join and learn more about the home brewing process. There is a strong educational component in the meetings, according to Heitt, but don't let that intimidate you because he said they use normal, everyday language to make the club as “friendly, accessible and collaborative” as possible.

For more information on the club, head to brewthervillelabs.com.



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