

Craft brewers ferment more than beer

BY LORI VALIGRA
MAINEBIZ

When Adam Tuuri and Eben Dingman looked for the perfect spot for their new craft brewery in Lewiston, they waited more than a year to find their current location at 43 Lisbon St., just off Main Street.

It was a fixer-upper, but it was in the block where they had imagined Bear Bones Beer being located, close to three restaurants, and at 8,000 square feet, it has plenty of room to grow beyond the 2,000 square feet now in use.

"We wanted to be part of the downtown community," said Tuuri. "And we're close to Baxter Brewing. They are excited to have another brewery to go to after work."

To get established as a

brewery, the co-owners of Bear Bones Beer had to first get their area rezoned as light industrial, which would allow other businesses that made things to locate there. Both envision their brewery and tasting room, which are scheduled to open in a few weeks, to be an inclusive space where people of all ages can come to taste their beer. They even make Halal soda, as they are located near a mosque.

Bear Bones isn't the only new craft brewery trying to become an anchor in its community, a place akin to the neighborhood breweries that were common before Prohibition.

"At one time people knew their neighborhood brewer," said John LeGassey, co-owner of recently opened Fore River Brewing Co. in

the Cash Corner area of South Portland. "People are starting to get in touch with people who work in these industries." He points to a well-trodden path in the snow between two houses across the street, where customers cut through from a block away.

"There's a huge market here," said LeGassey, a former deputy marshal who owns the brewery with partners T.J. Hansen and Alex Anastasoff. "It's a place that didn't have a production brewery. We are the first."

Fore River has an open concept layout where customers in the tasting room can see the beer works in the next room.

"We wanted people to see us working while they have a beer. It engages them," he added.

The tasting room also has games like cribbage and Scrabble that patrons play while drinking a couple beers over one or two hours, he says. Fore River has 2,000 square feet, but hopes to expand with an outside seating area once it gets permission from the city.

Another neighborhood anchor will be Bissell Brothers Brewing Co., which will relocate to Thompson's Point in the second quarter of this year. Having other craft brewers in the area helps stimulate business for all, notes LeGassey.

Eli Cayer, founder of Urban Farm Fermentory and the new Gruit brewery, can attest to that. Once the only fermentory in the East Bayside neighborhood of Portland, UFF has been



BDN FILE
T.J. Hansen (left) and John LeGassey sort kegs while waiting for their first shipment of hops and yeast at Fore River Brewing in South Portland in December.

joined by Rising Tide Brewing Co., Maine Craft Distilling, Bunker Brewing Co. and, soon, new brewer Lone Pine Brewing Co. The neighborhood is the most diverse in Portland, accord-

ing to the 2010 census, with 60 percent white compared to more than 94 percent for the state as a whole. The area is 21 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic, 8 percent
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BDN FILE

Don Brown of Hudson, a FairPoint employee and member of the Communications Workers of America speaks at a rally in March 2015.

Holding the union line

As Maine manufacturing falters, organized labor looks elsewhere

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Maine's union ranks have been hit hard by the decline of paper and other manufacturing jobs, but organized labor has held the line in other areas.

The decline in Maine and elsewhere leaves organized labor looking for other growing industries in the state, such as health care or lobstering, where workers might want to negotiate collective contracts.

"Any time there's a major shift in the U.S. economy ... I think it takes workers some time to figure out how to organize and have an effective collective voice in that new economic arrangement," Matt Schlobohm,

executive director of the Maine AFL-CIO, said.

The longer-term trend falls in line with the rest of the nation, where union representation and membership have fallen generally.

The number of U.S. workers employed under a union contract fell to 13.7 percent last year, down from 16.5 percent in 2000 and a recent high of 24.1 percent in 1983, according to federal statistics.

The trend in Maine is driven by a job decline in the highly unionized manufacturing industry.

About 80 percent of the drop in Maine from 2000 to 2015 came from a drop in card-carrying workers in manufacturing, where last year there were

about one-third the number of workers under union contracts 15 years ago.

Looking back another decade to 1990, about 90 percent of the private sector decline in union representation in Maine was in manufacturing, notably with large job cuts in papermaking. Paper manufacturing jobs dropped by about 7,000 in the past 15 years.

Meanwhile, public union representation has bucked the overall decline, and sharp representation declines in manufacturing have not come to other private industry, according to analysis of detailed federal data by researchers Barry Hirsch and David Macpherson.

Public-sector workers represented by unions in Maine out-

numbered those in the private sector by about 2-to-1 in 2015, which is the result of fairly recent declines.

Averaged over three years, the estimate of public-sector union workers has risen by about 1.3 percent since 2000. In the private sector, union losses have been steady but not as deep as in manufacturing, with 17.4 percent fewer nonmanufacturing workers represented by unions in the private sector.

Organizing ahead

Schlobohm said he thinks private-sector union ranks in Maine will hold steady in the coming years, encouraged by an economy he said "is out of balance."

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Getting the best deal on cell service

BY RUSS VAN ARSDALE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NORTHEAST CONTACT

With all the competing claims about coverage, speed and contract terms, it's easy to be confused when trying to get a good deal on cellular phone service.

CONSUMER FORUM

A good place to start your research is the website of the Maine Office of the Public Advocate at maine.gov/meopa. There you'll find basic advice on selecting a phone that meets your needs, choosing an appropriate service and so on.

Download the latest Ratewatcher Guide to learn more. Maine residents may also call 207-624-3687 to request a free, printed copy.

You also can get advice on what to do if you get into a dispute with your wireless service provider by visiting maine.gov/meopa/consumer.

Under the section on wireless companies, the advocate puts the consumer's task squarely on the line, saying, "Like cable companies, wireless companies are largely unregulated with respect to service quality and billing disputes with customers." In other words, be ready to stand your ground when disputing a charge or service.

This doesn't mean you should be nasty. Front-line customer service people are trained to deal with abusive callers, who don't get very far. Consumer advocates advise being courteous and calling when you're not rushed and the call center isn't busy — perhaps on a Friday evening.

Mohammed Halabi was interviewed recently on the CBC-TV program "Marketplace." Halabi runs a firm called Mybillsarehigh.com, which focuses on reducing Canadian consumers' wireless bills. He urges his clients to keep records of their calls, to give their phone numbers to the call center worker in case of a disconnection and to keep track of a reference number for that call — it may take more than one call to resolve your issue.

To get the best deal possible, you may have to dig deeper. Front-line customer service people are trained to deal with issues quickly, get callers off the line and move to the next call. They often are not empowered to offer price breaks of 10 percent to 15 percent below the best advertised deal — but a manager may be, especially if you're a longtime customer the company wants to keep. So, if you don't think you're getting anywhere with the first person who answers, ask to be transferred to a customer retention or loyalty specialist.

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Maine gas price average falls as nation's ticks up

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — The average price of a gallon of regular gasoline in Maine dipped slightly as the national average rose and some gas stations in the Midwest posted sharp one-week spikes in price due to refinery cutbacks.

The gas price tracking site GasBuddy indicated the average for Maine dipped by a little more than 1 cent in the past week, compared with a rise of about 2 cents nationally.

That put Maine's average at \$1.78 per gallon, compared with a \$1.71 national average. Maine's average

price was lower than Vermont's, at \$1.86 per gallon, and higher than New Hampshire's, at \$1.69.

Will Speer, an analyst with GasBuddy, indicated in the news release that the national average increase was due largely to refinery cutbacks in the Midwest, which caused regional prices to jump as much as 23 cents in one week.

"The spike occurred on the back of news that Midwest refineries were reducing production rates due to poor economics," Speer said. "The rest of the U.S. enjoyed another week of declining gas prices."

Federal and private sector forecasts estimate gas prices will



BDN FILE

The average price of a gallon of regular gasoline in Maine dropped to \$1.78 per gallon last week.

trend lower in 2016 than in 2015, with a less pronounced nation-

wide rise in prices through the summer.