

Hank speaks ... So Listen by Hank Bienert

Here's an article I found and, always thinking of CCH members, thought U generous readers might be interested in...especially those who are sleepless from wondering "What am I going to give Hank (who doesn't have a growler) for his half birthday which is September 5 although gifts are welcome anytime?"

You know the beer drinkers have won when you can fill your growler with local craft beer at a drugstore. At Dragoon Brewing Co. in Tucson, Ariz., Tristan White, left, and Eric Greene fill up.



The craft beer craze isn't slowing down, and as the number of breweries grows, so has the popularity of growlers—64-ounce reusable jugs that can be filled to take off the premises. With growlers, you get fresh beer. Often it is beer that is not available in bottles or cans. And you get it in a local, environmentally friendly way.

"I've come to realize that beer from the tap is better than beer from the bottle, and this is the only way of bringing the tap flavor home," says Jonathan Garonce, who last week filled a growler with Goose Island IPA from a beer tap station at a Duane Reade drugstore on New York's Upper West Side. Mr. Garonce owns two growlers, which he refills whenever he's having friends over. He also owns a smaller, 32-ounce growler, sometimes called a growlette.

Growler fans say that unlike just showing up at party with bottles or cans of beer, the jugs make an event feel more festive. Some beer drinkers like the flexibility: You can pour a little or a lot. A growler generally holds the equivalent of four pints of beer or a little more than five bottles of beer. A glass growler usually costs about \$5. The price to fill it varies, but is often \$10 to \$15. Most growlers have screw-top lids that help the beer stay fresh and fizzy for one to two days.

Some states have adopted laws to allow growler sales at places other than bars and breweries. Whole Foods Market Inc. started offering growlers in 2006. Today, it has 40 growler stations in nine states, and says it plans to add more.

"We had known of a few small shops in neighborhoods that were smaller versions of growler stations, and that's when the light bulb went off," says Christopher Manca, northeast specialty coordinator for Whole Foods. "If you don't live in the heart of one of these craft beer hubs, it is convenient for you if you're in Whole Foods anyway buying your food."

In New York City, Duane Reade fills growlers at in-store taps in Manhattan and Brooklyn, and offers beer selections from nearby Brooklyn Brewery. (A Duane Reade spokesman declined to comment.) In June, North Carolina became one of the latest states to change its law to allow growlers to be filled in beer shops, bars and grocery stores. Previously people there could only get growlers filled at breweries. The state was a late adopter, says Chris Hunt, owner of craft beer retailer Good Bottle in Charlotte. He expects the change to be a boon to business. "When we were finalizing our business plan, we took some trips in the Southeast, and it was obvious that places where you could fill growlers were making a lot more," he says.

Dragoon Brewery in Tucson, Ariz., saw keg sales jump after a similar change last year let it sell to local stores. According to Dragoon head of marketing Tristan White, in-house growlers have been an unexpected hit. The original plan was to make money mostly by selling to retailers and bars, but growlers now comprise about half the brewery's sales. And, adds Mr. White, the first day they filled growlers, the brewery "did the most business we'd had for almost a year in those two hours."

At Ale! Yeah, a beer shop in Decatur, Ga., growlers comprise 40% of the store's sales, though that number was as high as 70% when it first began selling growlers in 2011 after the state's law changed. Craft beer enthusiasts like novelty, says owner Eddie Holley, and "people get really excited at the beginning."

There are now as many breweries in the U.S.—2,500—as there were before Prohibition, which ran from 1920 to 1933, says Julia Herz, craft beer program director of the Brewers Association, a trade group based in Boulder, Colo. Survey data from the Brewers Association suggests that most craft beer drinkers are young, male and wealthier than average: More than 77% of craft beer volume is consumed by people who make more than \$50,000 a year. Surveys show they prefer beer brewed locally to mass-produced, bottled options.

The Brewers Association and other sources credit Charlie Otto with creating the modern growler in 1989. Mr. Otto co-founded Otto Brothers Brewery in Jackson Hole, Wyo. He learned about the tin growler pail—the pre-Prohibition method of beer transport—from his father. He eschewed tin in favor of half-gallon cider jugs. "I bought a little hand silk screener and silk-screened the first glass growlers with our logo right there in my backyard," he says. They were sold in the local liquor store and in 1991 were featured in a cover story in industry magazine the New Brewer.

The origin of the term growler is murky. Popular lore, says Ms. Herz, claims the name comes from the hissing sound of carbon dioxide escaping the tin pail's lid as it is opened.

The popularity of growlers has spawned side businesses like Portland Growler Co., which sells artisan containers. Co-owner Brett Binford said breweries initially thought the \$65 ceramic jugs too expensive for consumers. Then the company had a spike in sales after it was featured by design blogs NotCot and UnCrate in 2011. The Portland, Ore.-based company went from selling 300 growlers the first year to 3,000 the second. Now it sells in breweries, too.

Mr. Manca of Whole Foods says the growler may be reaching its zenith: "You'll see it level off a little bit, naturally, but the demand for good-quality, local draft and craft beers is definitely not something that I would anticipate waning anytime soon."

I called Rouse's and Whole Foods and WF says they have no plans for helping to cure chronic tap beer thirst in south LA. But, R is seriously considering it...so let's say a prayer to St Arnold of Metz, patron saint of brewing who sees all we do and all the beer we make and WILL bless with a great brewoff those CCH members who are generous to the growler deficient scribe who writes for the Hopline –

THNX Hank