

MICHIGAN BEER GUIDE

Farmington Brewing Company

By Brad Probert

The Brewer's Association recently shared an interesting statistic on the growth of breweries in the U.S. Their analysis identified that 75% of Americans now live within 10 miles of a brewery. Now I can say I bested that statistic 20-fold, as downtown Farmington just opened its first brewery, Farmington Brewing Company, on November 15th. The 3 owners- father & son Gary & Jason Schlaff and Jason Hendricks- are long-time Farmington Hills residents who felt that downtown Farmington was a great spot for a brewery.

The pair of Jasons met while working together at a lab 6 years ago. Schlaff is a microbiologist and Hendricks is a chemist. After talking at a party and finding a common bond with Simpsons trivia, they decided to buy a homebrew starter kit together from Adventures in Homebrewing. They recalled, "It was an American Ale extract kit. We liked it, but knew we could do better." They quickly transitioned to all-grain brewing and were on their way to perfecting their art. Schlaff was an ardent reader of books of brewing history. The two would discuss the stories and apply their scientific knowledge to weed out fact from fiction and gain insight on how to better their processes. Eventually, they found themselves brewing every week.

Jason's father, Gary, was the happy taster of their brewing evolution. Gary said, "They brewed a Cream Ale. Tasting it, I knew it was good enough to sell. I told them people will buy this." Gary recently retired from Channel 7 as Research Director so he could put his full energy into the brewery. He used to bring their homebrew to parties and get-togethers with work colleagues. Their brew became well-known and in demand at those gatherings.

It was about 2 years ago that the team got the serious idea about opening a brewery together. They all felt that downtown Farmington was the right community and right spot for a brewery, and they had personal ties to the city they called home. They con-



templated other names for the brewery, but concluded Farmington Brewing Company was clear and to the point. It captured the tie to the local community that they wanted. After looking at different locations, they decided

upon the spot on Grand River near Farmington road. The previous tenants ran a coffee shop there and roasted their own beans. It made a good fit for the infrastructure needs of a brewery.

The licensing process took several

months, working through several local, state, and federal agencies. They experienced some delays at the federal level and it seemed they had hit a snag in the approval process. They decided to call their U.S. Representative,

Kerry Bentivolio, to see if he could help out. As it turned out, Kerry was a craft beer fan, and was excited to help the trio out. Jason recalls after his Friday afternoon phone call with the Representative, the following Monday morning he got a call from the agency saying their application would be approved that day. Jason said, "When I asked why everything was suddenly moving after being stalled for weeks, they replied it was now a congressional issue." Don't say Congress is all deadlock...

In the meantime, the brewing duo received the warm hospitality of the brewing industry you hear so much about. They recount stories of continual support from **River's Edge**

Brewing, an intensive Q&A session with the **Woodward Avenue Brewing** staff, and how **Elk Brewing** let them spend a whole day brewing with them, which was a particular benefit. Farmington Brewing has the exact same Michigan-made Psycho Brew system as Elk Brewing, so they got the opportunity to extract all the nuances and tricks to getting the most out of the system without hav-

ing to learn the hard way. Jason captured the communal spirit in the Michigan brewing industry this way: "If someone wanted to open a brewery, I'd encourage them to do it right across the street. And I'd help them."

This past fall, before their formal opening, they got a feel for how hungry Farmington was for the brewery. In early October they put mug club memberships up for sale to the first 150 takers. They were surprised to see people lined up for 2 hours outside on what was an unseasonably cold Saturday with overcast skies and drizzle. Then opening day followed suit with a line of people down the sidewalk, waiting for the doors to open at noon. Surprised people downtown mistakenly thought the line was for the theater next door, not used to a crowd like that mid-day on a Saturday. The brewery quickly filled their 85-seat capacity.

They plan to be closed Monday and Tuesday, and open in the afternoon through evening hours the rest of the week. Based on the size of the building and the close proximity to the brewing equipment while sitting in the bar, they are brewing in the mornings during the off hours before they open for serving. Although they don't have a kitchen, with the



FBC team L to R are Gary Schlaff, Jason Hendricks, Jason Schlaff

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The queue to get into Farmington B.C. on opening day.

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great community support they've received, they have several arrangements made or in the works with local restaurants to provide delivery.

They have 8 tap handles, and they cover a wide array of beer tastes. Although their Double IPA and Blood Orange Wheat were the first to be emptied by the consuming masses, they also have some uncommon gems hiding out in their line-up. The Cream Ale is a nice clean refreshing beer that makes the back-story of cream ale worth researching. And I learned that Witbier can be made with either Belgian or German yeast strains, producing a much different tasting beer. Not a personal fan of Belgian yeast, I found their German Witbier delightful. As with many things found while exploring craft beer, the more you know doesn't necessarily make things easier- it can make them harder. Because now when I see a Witbier, I have to figure out what kind of yeast it's made with! But I look forward to the 0.5 mile walk for more education. **MBG**




WINTER FEATURE TAPS

JANUARY
**PEAK NUTBROWN
STEELHEAD RED**

FEBRUARY
**PEACE, LOVE, & CHOCOLATE
MICHIGAN BELGO PALE ALE**

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PÒG MÒ THÒIN

Kiss My Scottish Arse

scotch Ale

SCHMOHZ BREWERY

NEMO ME IMPUNE LACESSIT

Pucker up and enjoy this full-bodied, bold wee heavy. Its frothy tan head, slightly smokey flavor and hint of roast caramel/coffee finish will knock you on your bum. But it tastes so great, you won't mind.

9.2% ABV

MADE IN MICHIGAN

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is coming
to Lapeer!**

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