

MICHIGAN BEER GUIDE



Big Brew Day 2015 in Detroit

By Brad Probert

In 1988, Congress declared May 7th as National Homebrew Day. Not long after that, the American Homebrewers Association (AHA) created a large-scale community brewing event called Big Brew Day, to be held on the first Saturday of May each year. Big Brew Day serves two key purposes: 1) raise awareness of homebrewing with non-homebrewers, and 2) promote community amongst homebrewers. The AHA has another event in the fall, called Learn to Homebrew Day, on the first Saturday of November. This is obviously a much more direct attempt to draw in newbies to the hobby.

Big Brew Day for 2015 was on May 2nd and had 11,004 participants spread across events in all 50 states, and 14 countries globally. This is just registered events that reported their plans to the AHA. Big Brew Day also is supported by smaller groups and individuals that participate in their driveway or on their back deck and join in the merriment by brewing one of the official recommended Big Brew Day recipes, or simply joining the 'around the world toast' at 12 Noon Central Time.

There were events held all across the state on May 2nd. In the metro Detroit area, local homebrew shops and homebrew clubs held events at Adventures in Homebrewing store locations in both Taylor and Ann Arbor with 10 – 20 brews at each. The homebrew club Kuhnhehn Brewers Guild (KGB) had 25 brewers with 80 gallons of beer brewed. Steve Smalenberg, President of KGB added, "The sun was so intense (beautiful day), reflections from pot lids melted a hole in the club banner!" Although there's a certain attraction to braving the elements and sitting over a pot of boiling, steaming wort in the middle of winter, there's also an obvious attraction to spending the day outside in those early spring days bathing in the sun.



There's also a special event in metro Detroit that draws in homebrewers from around the state called Mills Big Brew Day. Rochester Mills sponsors this event in the parking lot at their production brewery in Auburn Hills, coordinated by the Pontiac Brewing Tribe homebrew club. This event started in 2001 at the now-closed **Big Buck**

Brewery location in Auburn Hills, but the club and event followed head brewer Eric Briggeman when he moved to **Rochester Mills Beer Co.** In 2012, they took the event to the next level when they held the event on the last Saturday of April- 1 week ahead of the official Big Brew Day. This freed up homebrewers to join the Mills Big Brew Day in April, and still participate in their own clubs' events on the first Saturday in May. Averaging over 100 batches of beer brewed at the event over the past 3 years, this year's event was no different with 98 batches brewed for 748 gallons brewed on site. Rochester Mills supported the event not only through the use of their space, but provided brew water, yeast, and they worked with Cargill Malts and S.S. Steiner Hops to donate raw ingredients.

When registering for the event, homebrewers identified how many pounds of Pilsener malt they needed, and how many ounces of each of the 4 different hop varieties presented. Brewers didn't have to limit themselves to just the ingredients provided, but to compete the Big Brew Review (tasting competition held 6 weeks after Mills Big Brew Day), the beer had to be brewed on-site on April 25th.

The gates opened at 9AM that Saturday for people to pull into the back parking lot at the brewery and drop off their brewing equipment. With each added brewing set-up, the space between brewers shrunk down until all were cozily filling the parking lot from end to end. Equipment ranged from simplistic to ultra-sophisticated with all levels in between.

As an experienced or inexperienced homebrewer, the event was a great opportunity

to learn. While waiting for the next step in the brew process, people walked around and talked to other homebrewers. Perhaps to understand how they built some crazy piece of equipment, how they came up with their recipe for the day, or simply to exchange some beer samples. If you were curious how others dealt with a particular problem you were having with your brewing, you could simply stroll down the parking lot and get 5 different viewpoints in a manner of minutes. It was like a homebrew talk forum, only without the waiting for responses and without all the computer screens and impersonal interaction.

The Big Brew Review was held on Sunday, June 7th. Starting at Noon, 44 of the 98 brewers went back to **Rochester Mills Production Brewery** with their beer brewed back at the April event. During the tasting, people walked around from table to table sampling the varied creations for several hours. This was another great learning opportunity. If you tried something interesting, you could ask the brewer what type of malt they used, or any special processes and get immediate feedback between what you tasted and how it was made. Everyone got a voting sheet and picked their favorite 4 beers. The top 3 finishers were announced, and the winner (Dean Shipman with his Black Rye) will work with the Rochester Mills to make a batch of his winning recipe on their 15-bbl system and have it served at Rochester Mills brewpub. But if you didn't make the top cut, it was still rewarding to hear feedback on your brew and inquisitive questions about what you did (and turning a blind eye to those that dumped out their sample at the bucket at the next table).

If you're a homebrewer and have never attended one of these large group brewing events, it's a great learning experience, and fun way to enjoy the hobby even more. If you're not a homebrewer, it is a good way to get a first-hand glimpse at the hobby and see if it's something you're interested in. And in either case, I definitely recommend attending any event that offers free taste samples of freshly made beer! **MBG**