

Hops are the crop

Anderson aims to brew 'curious beers of distinction'

David Anderson expects to be rich, though he doesn't think he'll ever make much money.

The wealth he envisions includes doing something he loves, working at home, creating a sustainable business, making friends and brewing unique beers.

"I'll be immensely rich in the community and customers I create," he predicted.

Over a decade ago Anderson came up with a concept that he thought was just a crazy idea. But now the term he coined – "BrewFarm" – is becoming reality.

Anderson, who began making home-brewed beer in the early 1990s, will plant the first hop vines on his 35-acre farm and begin construction of his own brewery this spring. The combined operation, Dave's BrewFarm Brewery on Little Wolf Farmstead, is in the village of Wilson in eastern St. Croix County.

Anderson majored in psychology and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Hamline University in St. Paul.

"I figured with a psych degree, if I did anything with people, I'd be covered," he said.

He started brewing beer at home in 1993.

"People seemed to enjoy my creations," he said. "At least they liked that I gave them free beer."

Buoyed by that, he went to the Siebel Institute of Technology in Chicago to learn commercial brewing techniques.

He attempted to open a brewpub in Plymouth, Minn., in the mid-1990s, but that fell flat.

"Long story short, I couldn't raise the investor capital to get the project fully funded and operational."

Around that time he took his first brewing job, working for Ambleside Brewing in Minneapolis for the 1 1/2 years the company lasted.

Later he sold specialty beer for a wine company in the Twin Cities. He moved to Massachusetts to work with a beer importer and got back into brewing, working for Paper City Brewery in Holyoke, Mass., for over two years.

He created a craft beer export company called Brewer's Alchemy Exports.

That business, he said simply, "was ahead of its time."

He moved back to Minneapolis and picked up a few consulting jobs. He spent about three months in Saigon, Vietnam, working with a start-up brewpub called Diplomat Garden Restaurant and Brewhouse; 10 weeks in Aosta, Italy, working with Aosta Brewing SAS, a start-up craft brewery; and two weeks in Israel, working with another start-up company, Dancing Camel Brewery. He also worked on brewery layout and equipment sourcing for Crow Peak Brewing Company in South Dakota.

Anderson is a Great American Beer Festival judge and has judged at the Birra dell'Anno (Craft Beer of the Year) competition in Milan, Italy, for the last two years.

He has judged home-brewing contests over the last 12 years.

The term "brew master" is too sacred to apply to himself, said Anderson, noting that the word, of German origin, implies doctorate-level education and years of experience.

"I call myself a 'brewer' or 'chief cook and bottle washer' – much closer to reality," said Anderson.

"I want to push the edges," he said of Dave's BrewFarm. "I want to create 'curious beers of distinction,' in other words not your normal offerings."

Still, he said, he will brew some beers that are like those people already enjoy.

"I want the pub down the road to be able to serve my beers to the locals without them spitting them out or crying."

As for his operation, he said, "I want to give back ... I want to inspire, to educate, to enlighten. I want people to see what's possible, to dream and make that dream a reality.

"I want people to see alternative to the status quo and make decisions that can affect themselves and the world we live in positively."

The brewery

Anderson said the building, about 3,000 square feet for the brewery and another 1,000 square feet for a living/reception area, will be energy efficient and stable.

He has a permit for a 20 kilowatt wind generator on a 120-foot tower and expects that will power nearly all the equipment he uses.



David Anderson

Solar panels will heat water.

"Breweries use lots of hot water," said Anderson.

The heating and cooling

system will be geothermal. Waste water will go into a "grey water" recycling system to irrigate hops and other crops.

"A lot of thought is going into this," said Anderson.

Although he will distribute his own product and expects to do plenty of driving for that, Anderson won't be commuting to work. Initially his living space will be part of the brewery. Later he'll build a separate house and convert the brewery space into a reception and tasting area.

He has ordered hop rhizomes from Colorado and bee hives and hopes to be brewing by fall.

It was once very common for farmers to be brewers also, said Anderson. In the 1860s and 1870s, Wisconsin was the No. 1 hop-growing state in the nation, so he has no fears that the vines won't survive.

"Hops are kind of weed-like," said Anderson. "It's often harder to kill them than to grow them."

He plans to grow an acre or two, about 200 to 300 vines. (The hop plant has "vines" with stout stems and stiff hairs rather than the more delicate tendrils and suckers that vines have.)

"Harvesting will be by hand," said Anderson, who plans to pay volunteers in beer to pick hops.

The plants take a few years to establish themselves and become productive, so at first, he'll be outsourcing most of his ingredients.

For now, Anderson will be his only employee.

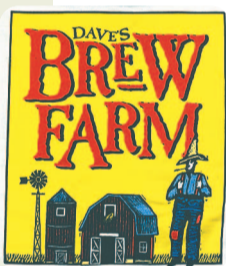
"As the business unfolds, I'll have to make decisions where I will need help and hire accordingly," said Anderson. "I hope to enlist the help of students at UW-RF and UW-Stout for various (agriculture) projects and renewable/sustainable projects.

"I want to promote a living classroom atmosphere at the BrewFarm."

He added, "Beer is fun. The potential of beer is nearly limitless, and I will constantly innovate and push the boundaries of what beer can be."

Anderson plans to have a Web site to list the bars, restaurants and stores that stock his beers.

(Story by Judy Wiff, RiverTown Newspapers, regional@rivertowns.net)



Dave's BrewFarm Brewery

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