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Wauconda's Small Town Brewery not your father's taproom



Bartender Jenessa Bartells pours a beer at Small Town Brewery in Wauconda.

Steve Lundy | Staff Photographer

By Suzanne Brazil
Daily Herald Correspondent

Small Town Brewery's new taproom is owned and operated by Tim Kovac, whose brewing genes, at least according to family legend, date back to a ship captain from the 1600s.

The brewpub, located at 1000 N. Rand Road in Wauconda, has only been open for a couple of months but is selling out of popular growlers and multiple flavors of new microbrews.

"The whole point of the taproom is to get people to try all our beers. That's our real passion, sharing the beers with customers," Kovac said. "Other bars can't handle our rotating cycle of 16 beers, so we built our own. This way we can see what will be the next big hit."

The brewery already has one big hit on its hands: Not Your Father's Root Beer.

Motif: The main room is spare and cool, with ocean blue walls and corrugated metal wainscoting. The polished solid oak bar is located on the rear wall and is wrapped in the same corrugated metal. Pendant lights illuminate the bar area while strings of bare Edison bulbs hang in scallops from the exposed metal and ductwork ceiling over the rest of the taproom.

There is bar seating for about 15 on high-back stools. The main floor includes 11 high-top tables with padded, black leather bar stools for four or six customers. Two flat-screen TVs are mounted behind the bar and two more on the right wall. Two large landscape windows allow patrons a view into the beer-making process and frame the brewery's mammoth silver tanks where the magic happens.

Food: Several area restaurants deliver to the taproom, and gourmet food trucks have also made appearances. Our server provided menus to a local eatery and we had delicious hot burgers and pizzas delivered to our table within 40 minutes of ordering. Food truck season is almost over, but Kovac plans to have them back in the spring. Patrons are also welcome to bring in their own food.

Unlimited free pretzels are provided as a palate cleanser between beer samples.

Liquid consumption: The popular new French Toast Beer was sold out by the time we arrived, but we had more than a dozen other flavors at our disposal. Favorites included the national smash hit Not Your Father's Root Beer, available in 5.9 ABV, 10.7 and a limited offering in the 19.0 range, and a bourbon pecan beer that went down easy with a nutty, sweet buttery flavor. A strawberry rhubarb had a light, crisp berry taste, and Not Your Father's Ginger Ale was high on everyone's list.

Each patron chooses up to four flavors, marking them on their flight sheet with a dry erase marker. The server places them next to their description on the sheet and everyone shares. Soft drinks and water are also available.

Daily specials are listed on a chalkboard behind the bar and vary daily depending on what's on tap.

Crowd: We found one or two empty tables when we arrived at 6:30 p.m. on a Saturday, but they quickly filled up and remained that way most of the night. Some groups ordered dinner and lingered, some were there just to sample the beer. The crowd ranged from millennials to retirees, skewing younger as it grew later. The bar regularly hosts out-of-towners and even some international visitors.

Music: A mix of contemporary and classic pop/rock was featured on a jukebox on one of the TVs behind the bar. It was loud enough to enjoy while still allowing comfortable conversation. For now, Kovac wants to focus on sampling beers with customers but has future plans to host comedians and musical acts.

Service: The owner and founder remains heavily involved. "Either myself or my son Jake, who manages the brewpub, is there most of the time," he said.

Our server was knowledgeable and efficient in explaining the selection process. She answered our questions about the popularity of certain flavors, was attentive at refilling or removing our glasses, and made easy conversation.

Parking: There are plenty of spots in front and extra parking behind the building. The brewery sign isn't large and can be hard to spot, so be on the lookout.

Overall: Small Town Brewery is a not-to-be-missed treat for those who enjoy specialty beer, plus it's a fun gathering spot for a night out with music, sports and friends.

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