



DAILY NEWS

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RITUALS

Spring cleaning

Students pick up trash along bank of Milwaukee River ▶ Page A2



John Buchel/Daily News Staff

Riverside Brewery brewmaster Chris George works on his version of Lithia Beer, a reincarnation of a locally brewed favorite. The Lithia name was purchased by local entrepreneur Gunter Woog, who is working with George on the brew. While Dorothy Walter, whose husband used to produce Lithia in West Bend, said she's not thrilled with the beer's return, Woog said many are anxiously awaiting a chance to try it.



BREWHAHA?

Family not thrilled by Lithia's return

By JOHN BUCHEL
Daily News Staff

A local entrepreneur is rolling out an old favorite for the grand opening of West Bend Mutual Insurance's new corporate headquarters, and not everyone is excited about it.

Gunter Woog, founder of U.S. Imagineering in West Bend, has reincarnated Lithia Beer, which for decades had been a locally brewed favorite among beer drinkers and plans to debut at the insurance company's ribbon-cutting ceremony May 8.

"I intended to brew a beer based on high-quality mineral water because it's good for you," Woog said. "The name 'Lithia' implies mineral-type water."

Chris George, brewmaster at Riverside Brewery & Restaurant, developed a test batch of the beer and is brewing it to debut at the grand opening.

"A lot of people are interested in the beer and the taste," Woog said. "We've had overwhelming favorable response that people are very excited about it, that we're bringing back the pride of West Bend and that sort of thing."

But Dorothy Walter of Eau Claire said her family is not pleased the beverage will again be palatable for the masses. Walter said her late husband Charles and father-in-

"People are very excited about it, that we're bringing back the pride of West Bend."

— Gunter Woog, Lithia owner

law owned and ran the brewing of Lithia Beer, which stopped producing in West Bend in 1972 and altogether in 1986.

"They were the managers of it, they were the ones who hired their good brewmasters," Walter said. "What he should have done is contact my husband back in 1999 (when Woog obtained the name)."

"I was upset. I'm ticked off about it — that they would use the Lithia name," Walter said. "My husband was still alive when (Woog) applied for this right for the Lithia name. I just kind of think that it's an insult to the family to come out with all this stuff."

Woog said the Lithia Beer had never been registered with the government, and was available because the name had not been used in trade in 30 years.

"I've had the name for quite a while," Woog said. "I registered the name because it

has been abandoned."

Woog said his company formed a division — West Bend Brewing Company — to create the beer, and its patent attorneys could not find any record of registered Lithia trademarks. He said the company was trying to set up a meeting with Walter.

"We have every legal right to do that," Woog said. "If I had known they were around, I would have contacted them."

The West Bend area still had some Lithia enthusiasts who are excited to experience the return of the beer, Woog said.

"I would think it would be in the best interest of the community," Woog said.

"It's not going to be the same thing," Walter said. "It's not going to be the same recipe. That was our history. I don't think anybody else has the right to say we should be all excited because it's coming back to West Bend."

Brewing a batch of the new Lithia at Riverside, George said recipe information had to have blanks filled in and scaled down. Riverside did not have the capacity to follow through with the protein rests used in the original recipe, so he made adjustments.

To emulate the original beer's body, he used pre-gelatinized flaked oats instead of flaked corn or de-germinated corn grits in

Please see LITHIA/A7

FROM THE FRONT

Lithia: Recreating the recipe

the mash, he said. Base pilsen malt and corn as the main components of the grist, he said.

"There was no specification as to what kind of hops they were using," George said.

Based on the German heritage of the West Bend area, he decided to use Perle and Hallertau hops, in correct proportion to the 10 pounds Lithia Beer used to brew 125-barrel batches. In conversations with Lithia enthusiasts, they uniformly remembered the hoppiness of the beer and carried on that style.

"There will be a distinct bitterness to it, but it won't be overpowering," George said.

Woog said his company worked with SF Labs in Milwaukee, which has done a lot of work with breweries over the years and analyzed West Bend water for the production of the beer. Woog said if the first batches are successful, his company intends to contract brew the beer, distribute it locally through Jeff's Spirits on Main and on tap at Riverside.

"We've had a tasting there already and the original formula was a lot like Schlitz and Blatz and that was kind of popular at

On the Web

■ For more information on the history of the Walter brewing family, visit: www.falstaffbrewing.com/walter's.htm.

■ For more information about Lithia Beer, visit: www.lithiabeer.com.

the time," Woog said. "We do have some of the original formulas and we may bring those out later. We also intend to brew the Old Timers' Beer and the Christmas Beer as well."

At one time, the extend Walter family operated several breweries in Wisconsin as well as Pueblo, Colo. Her husband was president of the Walter Brewing Company in Eau Claire, she said.

Walter said other parties interested in reviving brewery history as a new brand, such as the Walter Brewing Company in Colorado, had contacted her. Ultimately, she said she was not against the use of the name, but preferred to be consulted and was irritated she was not in the case of Lithia.

"I was not against them using the name. They'll have to make their own history," she said.