

Fresh From the TAP

“You just can’t get a fresher beer than beer served right at the brewery,” claims Bethlehem Brew Works’ menu. With the exception of Hoegaarden, every beer sold at Bethlehem Brew Works is brewed right on the property. The serving tanks are immediately filled and the beer goes straight to the taps. So, when customers order a Fegley’s ESB or a Valley Golden Ale, they’re getting the freshest taste imaginable.

The Brew Works’ unique décor reminiscent of Bethlehem’s history as a steel-producing town and comfortable atmosphere both reflect the fact that it’s a family-owned and operated business. The Fegley family first looked in Bucks County and Doylestown when searching for a location, but after receiving word about a vacated department store in the Valley, they swooped. Here on Main Street was a spot with perfect demographics and location.

The Fegleys converted the old storage area into a seating area. After three years of construction, another five months of kink-ironing was required before they were finally open. “It was extremely challenging until about a year-and-a-half into it,” says Jeff Fegley, “but now everything is running quite smoothly.” Both beer and customers now flow liberally at the 250-seat restaurant/bar.

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Bethlehem Brew Works

569 Main Street, Bethlehem

610-882-1300

www.thebrewworks.com

Hours: Sunday–Saturday 11a.m. – 2a.m.

The signature flagship beers are the Valley Golden Ale, golden in color and touched with Cluster and Hallertau hops (flowers used to season beer); Fegley's EST, deep amber and full-bodied with a residual malt sweetness and hoppy flavor; and Steelworker's Oatmeal Stout, a unique blend of roasted barley, chocolate and black patent malts (nice medium bodied stout). In addition, three seasonal taps offer a rotation of 30 different brews ranging in autumn and winter from a Peche Lambic to Apricot Coriander (made with pounds of fresh apricots and coriander), Oktoberfest (amber-colored German lager), Weizenbock (a strong Hefeweizen) and Pumpkin Ale.

"Brewing different styles is important, because people prefer a variety of diverse tastes," says Jeff Fegley.

"I like to switch it up with different styles based on my mood and what I'm eating." Speaking of eating, the menu offers plenty to choose from, and naturally, all choices go well with beer. Potato pancakes with smoked salmon (\$8) make a crisp fall day all the better, and there's nothing like the Brew Works' Brewschetta (\$6.50), topped with tomatoes marinated in Duchess Belgian Ale, garlic, onions, basil, roasted red pepper and Parmesan Cheese. After delighting in a wide selection of appetizers, a perfect autumn selection is the Beer and Cheese Soup (\$4) which is creamy, with sharp cheddar and the Brew Works' own Valley Golden Ale.

Some of the house specialty entrees are the Slag Pot Meatloaf (\$11), ground beef blended with spices and Fegley's ESB and topped with a savory mustard beer gravy and The Works Wienerschnitzel (\$14), their version of the traditional German veal dish with garlic, capers, tomatoes and white wine. Ribs, steak, lighter chicken entrees and vegetarian lasagna round out the menu along with pastas and seafood, including fish and chips. There's also a kids' menu with kids' versions of the grown-up choices, macaroni and cheese and other petite preferences with equally mini prices.

During Musikfest, Bethlehem Brew Works offers Brewing 101, a class in which students can learn the basics about the brewing process. Participants are then invited to taste test the beer. Dick Fegley says the class helps a beer enthusiast understand styles and tastes. Education is also available right on the menu. The seven-step guide to beer production is a tool for those eager to learn while choosing their beverage.

On the lower level of the restaurant, The Steelgarden Lounge (open 4 p.m. to 2 a.m.) offers more than 100 Belgian beers made by other small breweries and monasteries, a terrific Single Malt selection and small batch bourbons along with a full bar. The live music is also an attraction.

Stay tuned: A second, even larger Brew Works is in the works in downtown Allentown. **LV**

Hop On By For A Taste

Weyerbacher Brewing Company

905G Line Street, Easton

610-559-5561

www.weyerbacher.com

Tours: Saturdays Noon – 3 p.m. Free admission, reservations not required.

Barley, malt, yeast and hops all mean more to Dan Weirback than to any old beer enthusiast.

Weirback, owner of Weyerbacher Brewing Company, fell in love with good quality micro-brewed beer when he first started home brewing several years ago. When he and his wife visited a microbrewery in Vermont, they decided they might want to try it out as a business.

"We had to go out and raise the money, which took a year and a half," recalls Weirback. Then they had to "purchase equipment and put everything together." In 1995, Weirback opened for business in an old livery stable in downtown Easton. Why the Lehigh Valley? It's home. Plus, he saw the revitalization downtown and found it exciting.

By 1998, the Weirbacks opened a brewpub right in the brewery building. "While the brewpub was open, we made a lot of good friends," says Weirback. But they closed the pub in 2002 in order to move the brewing operations to a larger facility on Line Street. "In the end," says Weirback, "we didn't have a choice. We were unable to find a facility that was affordable and suitable for both brewery and brewpub. The only choice was to move and carry on with the brewery."

The move has been a success. In the last few years, Weyerbacher has experienced double-digit growth, with beer available in cases, kegs and six-packs at stores throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, New York, Washington, D.C., Virginia, Ohio, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Weyerbacher currently offers more than 15 styles of beer, ranging from flagship ales, such as Hops Infusion, Blithering Idiots, Merry Monks' Ale and Old Heathen, to some popular seasonal brews such as Autumnfest, Black Hole, Winter Ale and Raspberry Imperial Stout. All beers are handcrafted and brewed only in small batches, combining American hops and European malts.

Weirback uses a Meheen MicroMaster, a small bottling line that "takes two people to operate and bottles at the rate of 50 cases an hour," explains Weirback. The actual brewing is as complicated as a chem lab. "First, we grind the barley malt and mix it with hot water," says Weirback. "Then, [we] soak it for an hour at a particular temperature. Afterwards, [we] drain the liquid off and add more water to rinse the sugars and flavors out of the barley. Then, that liquid is taken off and boiled."

But that's not all. Next, they add hops the flower whose taste is recognizable as the herb, or spice, particular to beer. Then they boil the brew for 90 minutes, cool it, and move it to a fermenter (holding tank). The final additive is yeast, which eats the sugar that was removed from the malt and converts it to alcohol. "The beer is kept in the tank for about a total of two weeks and later filtered and bottled." Concludes Weirback.

Weyerbacher recently celebrated its 10th anniversary by releasing a new brew called Decadence. Weirback brewed 1,000 cases of the beer, which contains spices, honey and secret ingredients and was divided among the nine states where he distributes. "We're a brewery of an eclectic collection of beers," Weirback adds. "That what defines us."

Every Saturday, visitors are invited to tour the brewery free from noon to 3 p.m.; samples are also free, and cases are available for purchase. **LV**

