



Big Horse still kickin’



Randy and Susan Orzeck, Big Horse owners and founders, when the pub first opened and, at left, in front of their 25-year-old downtown business.

Hood River's oldest brew pub turns 25

By KIRBY NEUMANN-REA
News editor

A certain vigor was always needed to run a three-story restaurant.

A new energy fills Horsefeathers and Big Horse Brewing as the downtown anchor restaurant celebrates its 25th year, and as original owners Randy and Susan Orzeck embark on a new identity — gastro pub — for the restaurant, also home to the original Hood River microbrewery, Big Horse.

The Orzecks hired a new chef, Jeff Croke, created a new menu, and are hoping for a fresh vibe for the picturesque establishment that looks out over Oak and Second Street.

“Gastro pub is fine dining-style food at more of a pub price and with a pub atmosphere,” said Randy.

Was the quarter-century anniversary the cause for doing something new?

“Yes, absolutely,” Susan said. “The motivation of getting a new chef was definitely a motivation — it was like, ‘Hey, 25 years, let’s do something different.’”

“We plan a year-long party for our 25th year,” Susan said, starting with the special beer release events this spring featuring the in-house ales of brewmaster Derrak Smith, who started a little over a year ago. (See adjoining article for more on Smith.)

From its beginning in April 1988, through the lean first few years, it took energy for the Orzecks to keep the operation on its feet.

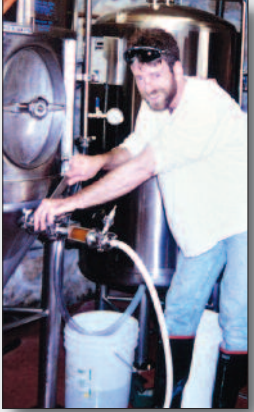
The food scene in Hood River in 1988 was not like it is today, and Randy Orzeck was setting out to create a fine dining establishment that would first be known as Horsefeathers Fine Dining and Spirits.

Randy was sales manager for a couple of large windsurfing companies, and first he came to Hood River on a windsurfing sales trip in 1981. He bought a house on the bluff for \$70,000, splitting time between here and Connecticut.

“I went home for a year, gave the company a year’s notice, told them to either allow me to work out here or I’m out. I just fell in love with it.”

Horsefeathers Fine Food and Spirits ran for about eight years as a restaurant complete with carrots cut into the shape of roses, set around fancy dishes such

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BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Server Sarah Veilleux displays the full flight of what’s on tap; server Cody Cornett samples the ales from the panoramic north deck; owner Randy Orzeck brews beer, c. 1994; current brewer Derrak Smith at work last week; Susan and Randy Orzeck and their new chef, Jeff Croke.

Photos by Adam Lapierre and (inset) submitted

Young buck settles in as brewer

By KIRBY NEUMANN-REA
News editor

Derrak Smith is the youngest brewer in any of the county’s five commercial breweries, and he works in the oldest, and smallest, ale house.

Smith’s story is a unique one, even in the diverse field of ale authors in our midst.

He works alone in a four-barrel system that expanded to six tanks last year from the original four installed by his boss, Randy Orzeck, who was the first Big Horse brewer.

In a brewing tradition seen all over Europe, he is handcrafting beers one floor below the pub where it is served. Big Horse has this in common with Full Sail and Solera, where pub areas also are located directly above the tanks.

What follows is an abridged profile and interview with Smith. For the full interview, go to hoodrivernews.com.

Smith is 27, and he has a son, Jude, 4. His history at Horsefeathers goes back to when he was too young to hang out in any bar. At 16 he and friends used to sneak into the lower level of the restaurant and play pool.

At age 18, he left Hood River and lived a year in the New York City area, doing volunteer work for a religious organization he from which he — and some of his immediate family — have since severed any ties.

He lived in Hood River a while, and then moved to Portland when he was 20.

“That’s where I got introduced to beer. I didn’t think I’d like beer,” Smith said. “People would say ‘Let’s grab a beer,’ and I would say, ‘I don’t like beer. Beer is crap.’”

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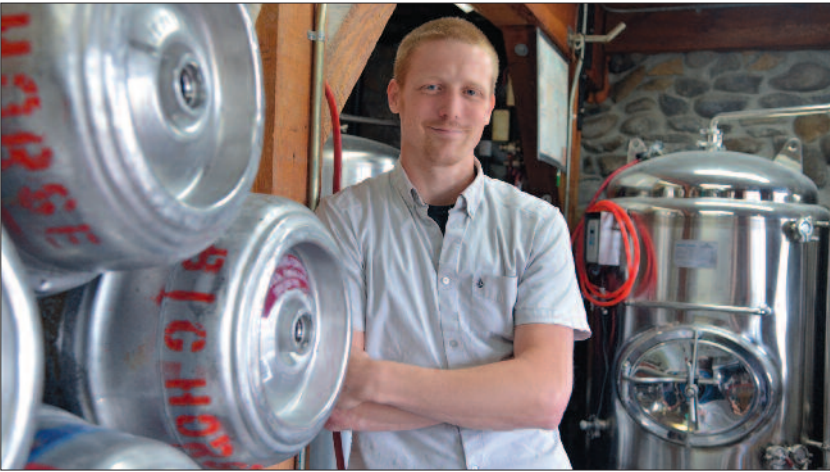


Photo by Adam Lapierre

DERRAK SMITH used to sneak into Horsefeathers at age 16 to play pool. Eleven years later, he works one floor below, as the Big Horse brewer.

