The Community of Brewers —
A Foundation of an Industry and a Craft

By Charlie Papazian

ABSTRACT

While giving some examples of how the community of Colorado brewers and beer enthusiasts have helped foster a positive image for the industry and craft of brewing, an international perspective on the brewing community will be examined. The brewing industry’s technical and educational programs are arguably the most important factor in contributing to industry coherency and healthy competition. These ideas will be discussed in an argument that emphasizes that industry coherency is needed to deserve admiration by consumers. Both a historical and philosophical perspective of the 21 year old Colorado based Association of Brewers and its various divisions and events will be included to support the premise that we must examine the “big picture” and evolve our technical and educational programs to address the current interests. This is the future challenge for the community of Brewers and the prosperous continuation of our craft.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

First reaction when the bubbles get to you as an amateur is “Wow, I can make beer.” Everyone thinks it’s the alcohol we produce that relaxes us, changes our mood and inspires our imagination. I’m here to tell you that I believe it’s the bubbles. They are mesmerizing. They hypnotize. Have you ever noticed the rhythmic motion your eyes slip into watching bubbles, then it’s your head... up and down and up and down. And before you know it one is easily afflicted with the motion of “Hey, why not start a brewery?”

These were the roots of the craft brewing movement I am so familiar with. I relate my own experiences here and my own perception. I’ve lived here in Colorado for 27 years and have been blessed with the good fortune of allowing the bubbles afflict me at least to the extent of becoming involved with the brewing industry for 22 years and making beer for nearly 30.

Somehow I dodged a career as a nuclear engineer and kindly slipped into a mode of beer education, ever since my friends tasted my first homebrew. So for 30 years now I have been a teacher of beer with all its glorious contributions to our lives.

If there is one singular truth I have learned about beer and brewing it is simply that if you are to become a brewmaster, you must have humility and you must never ever stop learning the craft of brewing beer.

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In the beginning you don’t understand this. You don’t get it. At first you are guided by passion. And that is good. Brewmasters appreciate this. There is a language of trust begun with the expression of passion. True brewmasters have humility. They are also teachers, as are the people that surround them.

This has been my experience of first being involved with a very small community of passionate amateur brewers in Colorado. The passion has grown into a knowledgeable community of brewers worldwide, seeking the continuation of their knowledge while maintaining their passion.

When asked to give this presentation, a request was made to make mention of the community of Colorado brewers and the contributions of the Colorado-based Association of Brewers. I was quite flabbergasted. “What? You want me to talk about the AOB? That’s going to sound like an advertisement - and I know MBAA policy has never condoned that type of presentation.”

So with a bit more discussion, clarifications were made. No, I’m not going to show you a commercial about the history and activities of the Association of Brewers and its various divisions which would have included the American Homebrewers Association and its journal Zymurgy, The Institute for Brewing Studies and its magazine The New Brewer, The Great American Beer Festival, The World Beer Cup, The International Beer Executives Symposium, Brewers Publications and the internationally celebrated annual “Big Brew.” I know the MBAA and I want my membership of some 15 years to remain in good standing.

The points I want to make, begin with sharing some of my 21 years of “professional” experience. But first let me start with the finish... with the punch line: The key to the brewing industry’s success was, and will be the pursuit of technical education. For all we do to promote our products to the consumer. For all we do to achieve quality in our products. For all we do to achieve quality in our companies. For all we do to compete in the market - there is only one most important and underlying glue that binds. This is the pursuit of technical education.

Passion begins the process of pursuit. I have seen this first hand. Passion may lead to success. Technical knowledge maintains success.

Here my deepest respect goes out to the literally thousands of homebrewers, professional brewers and beer enthusiasts in Colorado who have passionately volunteered and supported not only the endeavors of our Association of Brewers but the ideals of the international brewing community. Through their volunteerism, the Great American Beer Festival was founded in 1982, their enthusiasm for teaching us will never be forgotten. Their personal and company outreach, encouragement and continued support will never be forgotten.

From Colorado, word reached St. Louis and in 1983 I was welcomed to my first MBAA meeting which was a joint gathering of district St. Louis MBAA, and the ASBC local section. Invited to speak about the microbrewing movement whose momentum had not yet reached east to the Mississippi yet. I was also invited to brew a commemorative batch of homebrew by a most wonderful gentleman and MBAA member George Charalambous. George eventually managed to find a way to package that homebrew in commemorative cans donated by the Ball Corporation. The outreach and offer of technical support to the homebrewing community and the infant microbrewing industry was extended by the likes of Klaus Zastrow, David Hollows, Al Linnebach, Karl Markl, Raoul Palamond, Andy Laidlaw, Tom Schmidt and Andy Steinhubl. That was 16 years ago and you’ve got to remember their outreach was to an industry that in most assessments did not exist. Were they visionaries of sorts? Did they recognize how important it would be to help the little guy produce a quality product?

Word spread north to Milwaukee and in 1984 the brewers and allied industries there gathered to hear the growing story of microbrewing and homebrewing. There were several names I’ve lost, but I recall it was there I first met Karl Strauss and several others who have shared his passion for teaching quality to those who want to achieve quality. Gary Jansen, Gary Luther and Dave Ryder among many others have continued to help maintain Milwaukee’s commitment to extending quality assistance.

A few years later I can never forget the technical contributions of Inge Russel, Graham Stewart and Terry Dowhanick and their colleagues as they offered assistance to our craft brewing industry’s then infant publishing company, Brewers Publications. Their technical assistance with editing one of our first technical books was both generous and effective in reaching a passionate group of brewers seeking additional technical information.

I don’t mean to imply that the commitment to quality technical education was begun by these men and woman. Rather I view their involvement in bridging an educational gap as instrumental in establishing a continuum of knowledge and commitment to quality for the entire brewing industry.

If there is a second punch line to this presentation it is my feeling that our leaders know that the sharing of technical education for the improvement of the quality of all of our products
is the most important attitude that must prevail in the industry.

Sometimes I get a bit frightened by the use of the term “industry” when referring to the product that I have a passion for — beer. It is ultimately a product in the hands of the consumer. Their attitudes and the beer culture which they develop is inspired by our “industry’s” behavior.

It feels so damned great to be part of the technical community of brewers who are willing to get together, meet and share their experiences and knowledge for the improvement of the industry as a whole. I’ve watched this first hand over 27 years; since I moved to Colorado in 1972 and began teaching quality at the level I was capable of at the time. I’ve watched Colorado brewers (both amateur and professional) help lead the way, offering venues to exchange information that has served as an example of unity and has lead to a huge difference in the quality of beer in America and the world.

Technical education is not only about learning - it must also be instilled as an attitude that must remain bipartisan within the brewing industry. It contributes to unity. I think that the American brewing industry is unique in that it is able to find several venues to work together for the advancement of the entire industry. Competitiveness aside, technical education highlights the best of the best achievements and attitude of the world of beer. It shows! It shows in the great beer culture that the consumer has ultimately developed. It shows in the growing responsibility consumers are embracing regarding the enjoyment of our products. It shows in the quality of our beers. The glimmer of unity the technical community presents offers a path the entire industry should take notice of.

There is one perfect example of what we have and must maintain in our industry. In conclusion I want to share with you my feelings about the annual gathering of professional brewers from America and around the world that come together for three days to judge over 1,500 beers at the Great American Beer Festival. Next month I will again participate myself and simply marvel at the fact that over 100 professionals from nearly as many different brewing companies will gather together. Not only will they embrace the task of fairly and objectively evaluating all those beers, but they will share among themselves the passion they have for beer and the commitment to quality and brewing education. Just as has been done through 112 annual sessions of the MBAA, here in Colorado for the past 18 years, passionate brewers have recognized the educational needs of the brewing community and have helped inspire so many of today’s modern attitudes and educational programs.

The technical programs of the industry and the passion for beer and brewing are catalysts that should be recognized as a shining example of what a unified brewing industry can achieve.

We have had a quality attitude here at this 1999 annual meeting of the MBAA. Community, a passion for beer and a thirst for technical achievement. With this kind of attitude there is hope for other forms of unity in the industry. There is no other way to continue industry prosperity.