



THE

Northern Brewer

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREAT NORTHERN BREWERS CLUB

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Contact information via our website

The Prez Sez

By Elizabeth "Liz" Greer

Happy New Beer! GNBC has some fun and educational events planned for 2026. Our new Board and Officers have been elected and will start their terms January 30. Thanks to all members and sponsors who made 2025 a successful year at GNBC: membership is maintaining, we had some good meetings and more importantly increased member engagement in the club!

If you have not renewed your membership – now is the time! The January Craft Beer and Barleywine Industry Reception at 49th State is for members only. Billy Opinski will be the guest speaker. He has been a key member of the brew community in Anchorage. A co-founder of Humpy's, the most iconic Anchorage restaurant with an extensive craft beer tap, as well as the original Barleywine Festival. Alaska is known for some of the best barleywines on the planet*, and I venture to guess the internal state competition to brew the best of the best is why.

**"The best barleywines are often associated with Alaska, where many breweries are known for their high-quality barleywines. Alaska has become a significant producer of barleywines in the U.S., with various breweries showcasing unique styles and flavors." -Paste Magazine 2018*

Your support of the club is appreciated. Of course, your discounts at our wonderful supporting businesses make it worth the investment alone! It is easy to renew/join with a credit card or PayPal online: <https://greatnorthernbrewers.org/membership>

Upcoming events:

January 29 (Thursday) – Craft Beer and Barleywine Festival Industry Reception – 49th State Brewing (Members Only)

February 17 (Tuesday) – Tentative Club group brew

March 17 (Tuesday) – Gruits! Brew a beer without hops for sharing and input!

Meantime - If you have thoughts about some fun activities, please let me or one of the officers know. More information on the club and events on the Facebook page and website:

<https://www.facebook.com/Gnbc1/>

<https://greatnorthernbrewers.org/>

Cheers -Liz

Secretary's Corner: December Holiday Party

By Gwen Higgins

Mardi Gras came a few months early for the Great Northern Brewers Club. Anchorage Brewing Company's canning room was transformed into a nearly identical facsimile of Bourbon Street, decked out in purple, green, and gold, as guests dined on jambalaya, red beans and rice, and of course, plenty of beer. Among the many delicious desserts were jello shots inspired by New Orleans' iconic hurricane cocktail, and a classic king cake, complete with a lucky baby. Attendees dressed for a night in the Big Easy, some even wearing authentic Mardi Gras masks. Those who didn't come decked out soon found themselves covered in beads.



Thanks to Anchorage Brewing for providing the venue, to Jim Lamb for serving as organizer and Master of ceremonies, and to everyone who showed up for making it a great party!



As I am ending my time as Secretary of the club, this will be my last column. I look forward to reading future Secretary's Corners from our new Secretary, Nat Gingery.



Beer Research: What Lies Beyond Imperial Strength

By Rick Levinson

According to the click-bait, there is a beer that can eat through glass. Several questions come to mind. How do they package it? How do they drink it? Should anyone actually drink it? Does it taste good? Were any bubbas or other animals harmed during testing? Some beer research is warranted.

Well, I bit. The headline refers to an article in *The Wall Street Journal* that was a publicity device for the 2025 release of Sam Adams' Utopias. This is an ultra-high alcohol ale that set a record for the highest ABV beer ever made by the Boston Beer Company. It clocks in at *30% ABV*. That would definitely knock your socks off and probably dissolve them. It is a limited-edition release that they produce every two years. It comes in a collectable ceramic decanter bottle that is copper-glazed, and it looks like a classic commercial brewing kettle.



Based on ABV restrictions, Utopias exceeds the legal definition of beer in nearly a third of the country. It cannot legally be sold in AL, AR, GA, ID, MS, MO, MT, NH, NC, OK, OR, SC, UT, VT, and WV. Fortunately for us, AK is more enlightened in defining beer.

Utopias achieves its high alcohol content through extended fermentation with specialized yeast strains, not distillation, keeping it technically classified as a beer. Over timed stages, the brewers introduce a series of different yeast strains to a very sweet and dense wort. The specialized yeasts can survive in extreme alcohol conditions to convert sugars to ethanol. Some of the yeasts are borrowed from Champagne production while others were developed in-house at the Boston Beer Company. Each stage of fermentation increases the beer's strength without distillation.



The beer spends up to three decades aging in barrels and casks once used for Cognac, ruby port, white port, Scotch whisky, Irish whiskey, and Amarone wine, giving it a dark chestnut color. It is then blended with earlier Utopias vintages. The beer is said to have layered flavors of caramel, toffee, oak, and dried fruit, with hints of maple syrup and molasses, and subtle smoke and citrus notes. It has a long smooth malty, almost buttery, finish. It is not carbonated, and with its elevated ABV, it should have a long shelf-life. The company says it is dark, rich, distinctive, and memorable. It is definitely a "sip and savor" beer.

But will it etch glass?

Unfortunately, I don't have the budget that *Myth Busters* has, and Utopias has a lofty suggested retail price of \$240 for a single 24.5 oz (750 ml) bottle. (group purchase anyone?) So, we must resort to using AI, which is so smart that you don't actually have to test anything. It's the process they don't show on the final cuts of *Myth Busters*.

A deep AI dive says that, in fact, Utopias does **not** etch through glass. Indeed, no beer does. However, Utopias did eat through a cup once. It turns out that the cup was an insulated *paper* cup. Actually, it didn't eat through the paper either, but the alcohol seeped into the paper cup seam and softened the glue that held the cup together, causing it to leak its precious content. Apparently, the high concentration of alcohol acts like a solvent that can degrade some glues, linings, and plastics in certain disposable cups. While some extremely caustic materials can etch glass, the main chemical that does dissolve glass (silica) is hydrofluoric acid. It is a very dangerous chemical that I used way back in my geology lab class to dissolve sandstone (silica) rock, leaving behind imbedded fossils in pristine condition.

Hydrofluoric acid is not a constituent of beer; it would add a bit of harshness, I'm sure. And, it is certainly not something that I would want to put down my pipes.

Conclusion: the beer that can eat through glass myth is busted!

It does not physically or chemically damage glassware. It is just a metaphor for extreme strength and an intense beer experience. That said, Utopias is a delicious, strong, rare, and expensive beer that sounds truly amazing; one that I would want to savor from a proper glass snifter, not a paper cup. (Who serves a \$240 bottle of fine beer in a paper cup, really?)



Big Fish Homebrew Competition

By Ira Edwards & Elizabeth Greer

The Humpy's Big Fish Homebrew competition was held on Saturday December 13, 2025 at SubZero. A Respectable 27 entries we're judged at this sanctioned Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) event based on 2021 Style Guidelines.

There were some very good meads, ciders, and beers entered with five brews advanced to finals. The Best of Show went to a hazy IPA brewed by Andre Koehrer. Midnight Sun Brewing Company anticipates brewing this winner!

Special thanks to Humpy's for the support and the delicious lunch, to Arctic Brewing for collecting entries, to the stewards and judges, and of course everyone who entered!



Beer Tasting and Palate Training Class 2026

by Kevin Sobolesky

What it is:

We are hosting a beer tasting class that will teach you all about classic beer styles and train your palate to appreciate beer!



We'll meet on Sundays for a couple hours to enjoy light, fun lectures on topics covering beer history, ingredients, processes, and off-flavors. During each class, we will have guided tastings of classic beers to train your palate and learn about the wide variety of beer styles. By the end of the course, you will have tasted over 25 classic beers! This class is perfect for beer fans, homebrewers, servers, distributors, and package store employees.

How to sign up:

Contact Kevin at metkonig@gmail.com.

The class is capped at 40 people, on a first come first serve basis. We will start a waiting list if anyone does not show up for the first class (usually a safe bet to have a few no-shows). If you have any questions, please direct them to Kevin.

Where: King Street Brewing Co. 9050 King St, Anchorage, AK 99515

Cost: \$50 per person due at the first class

When: Sundays at 5pm, starting on February 1st

Current schedule: February 1, 15, 22 & March 1, 8, 15, 22



BJCP examinations are BACK! (Reprint from November)

By Ira Edwards

I took my BJCP class in Anchorage over 20 years ago, and with all of my activities, have been a nationally ranked judge for about that long. It was a great experience, and I have since taken wine and cider judging courses in Alaska and out of state, and I can say that the Beer Judge Certification Program curriculum is the most in-depth thing out there for judging beers, meads, and ciders. For many years, I helped teach a few of the topics in the BJCP courses run by GNBC, but since COVID, I have been living out of town, so I lost touch with the classes. Well, it turns out that we have not run any BJCP exams to get people certified in quite some time. I aim to remedy that.

As a National Level Judge, I am qualified to administer the testing, and so I am going to get rolling on that. It has to be scheduled at least 4 months in advance, and not longer than 24 months in advance. So I am thinking about finding a set of dates after the ski season and before salmon and trout fishing season starts in June. I have some other GNBC members who are qualified to help proctor the exams and tastings, so what I really need now is a pretty solid list of people who have taken the classes and now want to take the exams. I can schedule a maximum of 12 students per exam, but there is a process to get a waiver to host a larger session. Since we have not held an exam for such a long time, I am confident that we can get the waiver. If I get a solid interest in 70 students who want to test, I will need to schedule another exam session later next year, after I am done with field work and hunting. LOL.

BJCP has a pretty awesome online study guide for the exam, and there is an online pre-test to allow you to be qualified to sign up for the certification exam and tasting. Please email me ASAP if you have interest in a spring 2026 exam or a fall 2026 exam, and when you took the BJCP classes. I need that information to register to host an exam session and possibly apply for a waiver to the class limit of 12 students. My Address is rooster.skier@gmail.com. I will be signing up with BJCP before the GNBC Christmas Party in December, so I will repost this article as a reminder a couple more times.

Cheers!

Alaska Craft Brew & Barley Wine Festival Volunteer Opportunities

Peak 2 Peak Events, which puts on the Alaska Craft Brew and Barley Wine Festival is looking for volunteers to help with the event at the Dena'ina Center. The dates and times for the festival sessions are Friday evening 1/30, Saturday afternoon 1/31, and Saturday evening.

If you are 21+ and want to be part of Anchorage's winter beer tradition, we would love to have you on the pour team. Pouring volunteers receive one complimentary event ticket as a thank you. What you can expect:

- A fun, high energy festival environment (three sessions across two days)
- Clear guidance on shift timing and what to do at your station
- A complimentary ticket for volunteering

Requirements to pour: You must be at least 21 years old with an Active TAPS certification is required (if you are not currently TAPS certified, we can help you get registered for the class)

To sign up, Please complete the Volunteer Registration form here:

<https://anchoragedailynews.wufoo.com/forms/z1alkfsy0zzwjfn/>

More festival info here: www.alaskacraftbrewandbarleywine.com





*Great Northern Brewers
Club Members*
**2026 Alaska Beer
Industry Reception**
Thursday, January 29



The Great Northern Brewers Club will be hosting this year's
Industry Reception at:
49th State Brewing's Barrel Rooms, 717 West 3rd Ave, Anchorage

Featured speaker will be:

Billy Opinski, Co-Founder of Humpy's Ale House

- 6pm: Set-up and drop off
- 6:30pm: Club business
- **7pm-9pm: Industry Reception**
- 7:30pm-8pm: Key Note Speaker*

****We request conversations during the Key Note Speaker be taken out of the Barrel Room in respect of the speaker and audience***

Light appetizers will be provided as well as beer from home brewers, breweries and distributors. **Thank you for bringing your Homebrew!** Homemade food "pot-luck" items appreciated.
We could use some cookies!

We need **Volunteers** to help with check-in and pouring beer, Please plan to commit an hour+ for support - RSVP to volunteer:

president@greatnorthernbrewers.org Thank You!

GNBC membership card required, or membership can be purchased at the door for \$30.

Special thanks to 49th State Brewing for their support! **49th STATE**
- BREWING -

Many Thanks to Our Sponsors!



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