

# Brewsters breaks out

Craft beer pioneer to start selling at retail ▶ DON TSE

Since opening in 1989, Brewsters Brewing Company has been brewing great beer. Unfortunately, due to legal restrictions, those beers were available only at its restaurants, six in the Calgary area and a total of 11 throughout Alberta. Licensed as a brewpub, Brewsters was restricted to selling its beer at locations owned by the company.

"This meant that Brewsters could grow by adding more restaurant/bar outlets, but could not access the open market," says Matt Lanigan, co-owner of Brewsters. "Microbreweries, on the other hand, could sell beer in liquor stores and licensed restaurants and bars, but could not open restaurant/bar outlets of their own, [other than] one attached tasting room."

This antiquated distinction between "brewpub" and "microbrewery" was erased late last year, when the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission made policy changes and regulatory recommendations to combine these two types of licenses. As a result, small beer manufacturers will be treated the same.

By making its beer available outside its restaurants, Brewsters will be the first brewery in Alberta to

take advantage of this regulatory change. First, all Brewsters locations will make six-packs of their core beers available for sale. Next, those same six-packs will be available for sale at Willow Park Wines & Spirits by the end of August, with other retail locations to follow.

These are the first steps of an ambitious expansion plan. Brewsters is currently adding fermenters to its main brewery in the Foothills Industrial Park, which will immediately increase capacity by 35 per cent. Permitting applications have been filed to further expand brewing operations with a new brewhouse, even more fermenters and a new bottling line.

Here's a roundup of the six beers you'll be able to stock your fridge with:

• **WILD WEST WHEAT ALE** is made with 40 per cent wheat. This is not a hop-forward beer, but classic American hops do provide some balance against the gentle wheat spiciness.

• **RIVER CITY RASPBERRY ALE** is Brewsters best selling beer. Also a wheat-based beer, River City is

made with a puree of raspberries. This gives the beer a light sweetness that makes it highly quaffable and perfect for the backyard on a hot summer day.

• **BREWFOOT BLUEBERRY ALE** is made with ten different types of blueberries (who knew there even were ten different types of blueberries?). This beer is not overly sweet, but is balanced with some nice tannins.

• **HAMMERHEAD RED ALE** is amber in colour and malt forward, though hops provide balance. Look for a little caramel and a very gentle fruitiness.

• **RIG PIG PALE ALE** is the beer that made me fall in love with Brewsters. It has a great malt foundation and wonderful citrus flavours from Cascade and Centennial hops. This is a classic.

• **CURLY HORSE IPA**, the newest of these six beers, is made with one of today's hottest hops, Simcoe. This provides tropical fruit flavours to accompany the citrus flavours of Cascade and Centennial while Warrior hops provide a nice bitterness. ■