

Nurture Your Inner Beer Geek



By Dan Morey
Contributing writer

July 22, 2010 12:33 PM, Erie Times-News

Yorktown Centre at 2501 W. 12th St. has long been a destination for booze connoisseurs.

Its state store has the biggest and best selection in the city. Though I live a couple blocks from an eastside state store, I regularly make the pilgrimage to Yorktown for their Plymouth gin and Madeira wines.

Now, thanks to Yorktown Giant Eagle owner Joe Zegarelli, I have yet another reason to head west -- his brand new beer department. This malty paradise is a cork's pop from the state store and offers more than 350 varieties of domestic, imported and craft brews.

"I wanted to go upscale and give people a lot to choose from," said Zegarelli. "Between Giant Eagle and the state store, everything you could want -- beer, liquor or wine -- is available right here in Yorktown Centre. You don't have to go anywhere else."

The beer store is located in the front of Giant Eagle, adjacent to the hot-foods counter. You can carry out up to 192 fluid ounces (a 12-pack of pounders) at a time, and there's a cafe if you'd rather imbibe on site.

The cafe has a two-drink maximum, and a food item of some sort must be purchased. This could be anything from a 99-cent bag of potato chips to a full dinner prepared by Giant Eagle chefs. The dinners are matched with a specific beer to properly titillate your taste buds.

There are about 40 cold bottled brews available for single purchase at the beer store, and the cafe is a great place to enjoy them, thanks in large part to the people who operate it.

Zegarelli started out as a Giant Eagle bag boy 37 years ago in Pittsburgh and worked his way up, eventually becoming the youngest franchise owner in company history. When I came in, he was busy busting open cases of beer for one of his weekly sampling demos.

"It's funny, but I'm not really a beer guy," said Zegarelli. "I've always been a wine drinker, so I went out and hired three beer geeks to educate me."

I met two of the geeks -- manager Gabe Glass, who likes stout beer and bass fishing (in that order), and salesman Chris Allen, a bearded, bespectacled fellow who wouldn't look out of place in an orthodox seminary. His primary religion is, however, beer.

"I don't want to be called a guru or an expert," he said. "I'm just a guy who really, really likes beer. I want people to come in here, sit down, and have a pint in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. If they have questions and I can advise them in any way, I'm happy to do it."

Allen is particularly proud to stock lesser-known beers, like Trois Pistoles, a Belgian-style dark ale from Quebec's Unibroue brewery.

"You can't get this anywhere else in Erie," he said.

Yorktown Giant Eagle offers a number of unique brews, as well as all the popular standards, at excellent prices, so be sure to stop in some time and nurture your inner beer geek.