

Got Beer? Reaching Beervana: There's no suffering, but there's plenty of desire



This is our ninth Beervana Fest preview (we hadn't earned our Official Beer Writing Credentials when the first coupla fests took place). Waaaaay back in 2011, the 401 beer scene was taking baby steps toward the splendiferous bounty of riches we enjoy in 2019. At the turn of this decade, Beervana and the Great International Beer Fest (RIP) pretty much had the sampling-palooza field to themselves. Now we have the Rhode Island Brew Fest and Brew At the Zoo and the Craft Beer Races and the Brewers Guild throwdown and the Stadium Beer Fest and a slew of other hoppy gatherings.

So let's get into the delirious details of the 11th Beervana Fest, which is still Rhode Island's Unparalleled Beer Event (TM) (we've trademarked that phrase)! The elite event at Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet in Cranston will be bigger and better than evah, moving from Friday to Saturday, October 26, and hosting two sessions (1 - 4:30pm and 6 - 9:30pm; tix are on sale now at eventbrite.com). The fest's curators - Brian Oakley, co-owner of Julians and Mike Iannazzi, co-owner of Nikki's Liquors - have amassed another astounding array. There are 60-plus tables repping 100 or so breweries (there are multiple and wide-ranging offerings at the Shelton Brothers Importers and Nikki's Vintage Cellar), pouring more than 250 succulent beers (all numbers approximate; the lineup was still in flux whilst we were typing).

What about the beer-soaked details? You can study the list of breweries at facebook.com/beervanafest or on the opposite page, but there are some noteworthy beerists making their Beervana debut, including Hermit Thrush, Schilling, Interboro Spirits & Ales, Upper Pass and Barreled Souls. At the fifth Beervana Fest in 2013, there were four RI breweries in the haus; this year, 14 of the state's top beermakers will be repping the Ocean State. And Brian and Mike have whipped up a quartet of fest-only collabs with 401ers Buttonwoods and Sons of Liberty and Good Measure (Vermont) and Exhibit 'A' (Massachusetts). As you'll see while parsing said list, it's a bevy of ultra-rare/exclusive/unique/simple excellent ol-skool liquid gold poured by bizzers — owners, brewmasters, distributors — who pride themselves on raising the bar for better beer.

As we've noted at least a time or two in past previews, you can only make a small dent in the river of

beer at 'Vana (though you can double your fun if you have the stamina to attend both sessions). So make a few notes, get a tentative game plan (and a safe ride lined up) - or just dive in and follow your instincts. But we have some time-tested expert advice: in our 2012 Beervana hype, we spoke with Garrett Oliver, the brewmaster at Brooklyn Brewery, which will be back at Rhodes on the 26th, natch. He suggested "starting with lighter beers and then ramping up. If you go sprinting directly for the heaviest, hoppiest, sourest barrel-aged blockbusters, you can blow out your palate for the whole [session] and really miss a lot. Pacing is important." Truth!

Let's review: At Beervana, you get to experience some of the world's finest brews, compare notes with fellow enthusiasts and have a helluva great time. It's still Rhode Island's Unparalleled Beer Event(TM)!

Alas, this will be our final Beervana preview, and our last call in this space. We're relinquishing our Official Beer Writing Credentials (and surrendering our pretzel necklace). It's been a privilege to chronicle the ever-growing 401 beer scene in the pages of the *Providence Phoenix* (which expired five years ago - the time, it flies!), at the Bottles & Cans & Just Clap Your Hands blog and in these "Got Beer?" columns. We would like to express the deepest appreciation to all of the 401ers (particularly beer guru Chuck Borkoski) who have shared their insight, experience - and, most notably, time - since we started scribbling about the biz in 2011. Cheers!