

NHC Kicks off on Thursday

Written by Mark Emiley

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The annual gathering of homebrewers from all over the country will be kicking off this Thursday as Minneapolis hosts the National Homebrewers Conference. This event, run by the American Homebrewers Association, is where over a thousand homebrewers from every corner of the country meet up to talk all things homebrewing. Process, ingredients, special techniques, judging, contraptions; everything you can think of that relates to making your own beer at home.

The National Homebrewers Conference is also the culmination of the National Homebrewer Competition. This is the largest beer competition in the world with 6,287 beers being entered in the first round. Over 800 beers from around the country were advanced to the second round which will be judged at the NHC by Master and National judges from around the country, including all of the founding members of the Washington Homebrewers Association. Washington has 25 beers going on to the second round of the NHC where they will have the chance to compete for national glory. We wish them the best in this extremely competitive competition.

Though the conference begins on Thursday, there are plenty of pre-conference events beforehand with brewery tours and celebrations. Thursday kicks off in the morning with some judging, followed by the opening toast, and then dives straight into educational seminars. For those not attending the seminars, there is a "Hospitality Suite" where clubs serve their beer freely to attendees. Thursday evening features "Pro-Brewers Night" where local breweries come out to showcase their beers to a very eager audience.

On Friday the seminars continue with the keynote address happening in the afternoon from Mark Stutrud from Summit Brewing. Another couple of seminars in the afternoon followed in the evening by "Club Night." This is an orgy of great, weird, pioneering, and just amazing homebrew from all over the region. Clubs show up with incredibly decorated / themed booths showcasing their finest beers. There is nowhere else in the country that you will see such a variety or such cutting edge beers. The beauty of homebrewing is that you can try anything, and you'll see all of that here. You have to go to Club Night to truly understand it, but once you do, you'll be hooked.

Saturday features more seminars followed by the Awards Banquet where the winners of the National Homebrewers Competition are announced. It features a dinner prepared by Sean Paxton, the Homebrew Chef, paired and prepared with Rogue beers. It is a memorable culmination of the conference.

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About a dozen homebrewers from Washington will be making the trek out to Minnesota for the conference this year. Last year a large contingent of Washington homebrewers travelled down to San Francisco and hosted a booth at the Club Night. There will probably be a large contingent going to next year's conference in San Diego so start thinking about taking some time off in June!

Washington is looking to host the conference in the nearby future and the NHC one of the main reasons that the Washington Homebrewers Association (WAHA) kicked off their legal effort to allow the transportation of homebrew out of the house of production in 2009. Up to that point, homebrewers legally were only allowed to remove 1 gallon for competitions and couldn't even take it to their neighbor's house to enjoy legally. Passage of SB 5060 greatly expanded our homebrewing rights and made it possible for us to legally host an event like the NHC.

I'll be posting a few more articles about the NHC later in the week and afterwards. I'll be judging on Thursday, serving on a panel of Master judges in a tasting of sugars in Belgian Tripels on Saturday, attending all of the seminars that I can, and tweeting the awards ceremony through the WAHA Twitter. We'll post info here and also have some articles posted on the Washington Homebrewers Association website at www.wahomebrewers.org. You can check our Facebook and Twitter accounts for update throughout the conference.

Cheers,

Mark Emiley

WAHA Executive Chair