

For Oktoberfest, let's focus on beer

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 By **BILL AND KAREN GARLOUGH For GO**

You meet the coolest people in the food service business. People with passion for what they do and the generosity to pitch in on good causes. I'd like to share a story about some folks who have this passion for both their product and people in need.

Food service facts

Last October, we chaired The Rotary Club of Naperville's Soup's On! fundraiser. This event was designed to build community awareness and financial support for our local food pantries and shelters. The beneficiaries were Loaves & Fishes in Naperville, DuPage PADS in Wheaton and Hesus House in Aurora. To maximize dollars, the following were completely donated: the facility (Tellabs), food from 24 area restaurants, beer, wine and volunteers from the Rotary Club and the community. At the end of six hours, we cleared more than \$70,000 that was rushed to the three charities before the holidays.

We needed a beer sponsor. Melanie Keller, the general manager of Rock Bottom Brewery (on Diehl Road in Warrenville) quickly agreed to help, supplying barrels of beer and bartenders at no charge. Rock Bottom and the other 23 area restaurants and merchants that participated are a shining example of the generosity common in the food service industry.

Since the mid-1990s, local handcrafted beers have gained broad appeal, as they offer an upscale beverage at an affordable price. These complex and versatile beverages are now featured at food and beer tastings. I recently sat down with Rock Bottom brewmaster Greg Matthews, a man who is passionate about the product he creates. Rock Bottom offers eight different beers at all times, four standard beers (light lager, pale ale, red ale, brown ale) and four rotating beers.

The rotating beers reflect the seasons, with lighter styles in the summer and heavier beers in the winter months. You'll find beer that ranges from light to full-bodied, varies in color from light straw-colored to red to brown to dark. The pale ales are the most hoppy and have a citrus



Melanie Keller, the general manager of Rock Bottom Brewery, on Diehl Road in Warrenville, and Bill Garlough.

COURTESY OF BILL GARLOUGH

Beer of the Month

16 oz. pint: \$4.79

Oktoberfest Lager: Rock Bottom Brewery brewmaster Greg Matthews plans to unveil his Oktoberfest Lager on Sept. 17. He describes this beer as reddish in color, with approximately a 6.5 percent alcohol level and typical of a southern German style of lager. Lagers pair well with traditional Bavarian fare and also work well with autumn dishes. Prost! -- Bill Garlough

aroma, toffee sweetness and pair well with spicy food. In contrast, the brown ale is rich and the most malty style beer and offers caramel, chocolate and fruity notes that pair well with steaks, ribs and chocolate cheesecake.

Matthews' mantra is the fresher the beer, the better. His batches are served within 30 days, ensuring a fresh, clean beer experience. Matthews also shared that his product is in keeping with the movement toward locally grown produce, as he sources 80 percent of his barley and hops from the Midwest and the remaining 20 percent is imported. No beer is bottled, eliminating the use of hundreds of thousands of bottles per year.

Matthews enjoys that he has the creative license to craft each beer to taste, and is not forced to follow corporate recipes. This gives each Rock Bottom location its own character. Rock Bottom Brewery features a monthly tapping of a new beer and celebrates the occasion with a party.

Beer/food pairing

Rock Bottom executive chef Abednego (Abed) Mejia shared that he incorporates a number of beers into his cuisine. He likes to add the Mud In Your Eye Light into the beer batter for the salmon fish & chips. Pizza is king in Chicago and Mejia adds brown ale to his pizza dough to give it a caramel character.

When asked about his philosophy of pairing food with beer, he believes you drink what you like. The Rock Bottom service staff is very knowledgeable and can make recommendations as to suggested pairings.

Rock Bottom Brewery will again be supporting Soup's On! Oct. 18 (visit www.soupsonrotary.com for details) and will brew a special beer to complement some of the wide variety of outstanding food that will be served during the event. After its unveiling at Soup's On!, this special brew will be introduced to the public at Rock Bottom Brewery.

Bill & Karen Garlough are the founders and owners of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the 2007 U.S. Chamber's Small Business of the Year. Bill is a master sommelier and pairs food and wine for My Chef Catering customers.