Brewing at home

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10,000 barrels of beer per year expected at Bayou Teche Brewery's new facility

ARNAUDVILLE — With the ceremonial cutting of a chain of boudin links, the Knott brothers of Arnaudville formally opened their new $1 million brewery Monday afternoon.

Bayou Teche Brewing has been in business for three years. But until recently most of its beer, while developed in the test kitchens in Arnaudville, was actually brewed in Mississippi.

Karlos Knott said that is rapidly changing.

“We will be moving our packaging line over in the next month or so, and then things should really start to happen,” Knott said.

The new brewery, just south of Arnaudville on La. 347, known locally as the Bushville Highway, currently has nine fermenters, the huge stainless steel containers that turn a mixture of malt, barely, wheat and hops into America's favorite adult beverage.

The company started out with LA-31, a pale ale.

“That is responsible for about 70 percent of everything we sell,” Knott said.

But the company is also gaining a reputation for its specialty beers, including the just-released Saison d'écrevisses, a beer designed specifically to go with south Louisiana's crawfish boils.

It, like all of Bayou Teche's beers, is designed with food in mind.

Knott said the idea came to him while he was stationed in Germany with the U.S.
Army in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Germany is a land of countless micro-breweries, each designed to complement the food of the region.

“It is all local,” Knott said. “If you drive the distance from here to Baton Rouge in Germany, you will find an entirely different beer.”

When he returned to Arnaudville after his military service, Knott set out, with the help of brothers Dorsey and Byron, to do the same for his native Acadiana. Their first commercial beer, LA-31, for instance, is designed to go with jambalaya and other Cajun and Creole dishes.

“We thought we had a foolproof business plan,” Knott said. “We'd brew beer and whatever we didn’t drink, we’d sell. That is more or less the same plan we have today.”

Whatever they are doing seems to be working. Saison d'écrevisses has only just been released, but Knott said the first batch is already sold out.

“That was a pleasant surprise. We are brewing another batch,” Knott said.

Such sellouts are becoming common for the brewery, which now employs four full-time workers in addition to the Knott family and friends.

Knott said the company makes, of equal importance to the brothers is the land and people of Acadiana.

The three are all proud Cajuns whose grandfather didn’t even speak English.

As a result, the three support numerous French language initiatives, and every six-pack of their beer has a message on the bottom promoting a nonprofit or charity that benefits the local culture.

The brewery has also worked with numerous area Cajun and Creole musicians and recently released the second in a planned three-volume set of rock ‘n’ roll classics all performed in French.

One of the reasons the new brewery took so long to become a reality is that the brothers were also determined to do it in an environmentally safe way.

Part of the new brewery is a series of holding ponds and marshes where the waste is allowed to biodegrade with the help of local plants.

“We may be the only brewery in America that has its own crawfish pond,” Knott said.

That system was designed with help from the LSU AgCenter and Whitney Broussard with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

“We just had it tested and they tell me the water coming out of that system is as clean as the drinking water in Houston, though I’m not sure how clean that is,” Knott said with a laugh.

The three are also big supporters of efforts to clean up and restore Bayou Teche, which flows near the brewery.

Because of all of this, as well as the quality of their beer, Knott said, the new brewery is becoming something of a tourist attraction.

“We are getting a lot of visitors from Belgium, France, England and French Canada. We had a group of 60 just last other day,” Knott said.