

Brewing Up A Crafty Career!

Wayne County Community College District offers more than 50 certificate programs. New certificates programs for the 2015-16 academic years include anesthesia technology, product development and prototyping and fashion design.

Jason Lorenz had just graduated with an associate's degree in Computer Science when he and his wife stumbled upon the Craft Brewing Program at Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD). A 4.0 student, Lorenz was motivated to take on more. He was already brewing beer as a hobby and thought why not learn more about it – in theory and in practice.

“I have been home brewing for many years and I saw this as an opportunity to take a hobby that I love and turn it into something more – like a career,” said Lorenz. “As a home brewer, you are not exposed to a lot of production equipment, but this program has its own dedicated fermentation science classes, micro biology lab and production brewing facility to really give you hands-on experience that I would not have otherwise.” When he began to research more about the WCCCD program he thought, “If I wanted to take this to the next level and open my own brewery, this learning experience would be what I needed.”

The program housed at WCCCD's Western Campus in Belleville is designed to educate students in the craft brewing market — understanding the culture, science and technologies behind modern production brewing is a large focus of the program.

As Campus President Michael P. Dotson indicated, “The Craft Brewing Program is a perfect example of how WCCCD responds to the changing economy and job prospects of our state.”

Jason Lorenz agrees. “I believe the goal is when you leave, you are in a position to understand what it is to be a brewer in a production facility and in a good position to take on an apprenticeship or as a brewer if you excelled in the program,” said Lorenz.

Although the definition varies, a microbrewery or craft brewery is a brewery that produces a small amount of beer. Exact definitions vary, but the terms are typically applied to breweries that are much smaller than large-scale corporate breweries and are independently owned.

Although an amateur brewer, Lorenz benefited greatly from the education. “I found that water and temperature ranges are way more important than I thought before,” he said. “You don’t have to be precise, but if you are trying to hit a certain flavor profile, you need to worry about temperature in every step of the process.”

The program enables students to talk with working brew masters and go on field trips to breweries. “Seeing a real system up close was an amazing experience,” Lorenz explained. “Reading a book on brewing is nothing compared to learning from someone who does this day in and day out. That inside knowledge is invaluable.”

The Brewers Association ranks Michigan 14th in the United States for craft breweries per capita. The state ranks 10th in barrels produced with 825,103 barrels of craft beer produced per year. In 2014, craft beers in the United States accounted for 17.6 percent of beer sales. Michigan’s craft beer industry ranked ninth in the nation in terms of economic impact, contributing \$1.85 billion to the economy in 2014. That ranking should continue to rise as production growth continues and as Michigan breweries become more popular throughout the nation. **Founders Brewery**, based out of Grand Rapids, tied with a San Diego-based brewery as

the fastest growing microbrewery in the nation in 2014. Both recently sold stakes of their company to investment groups in order to fuel further expansion.

Also according to craftbeer.com, an affiliate of the Brewers Association, the average American lives within 10 miles of a brewery. As a nation, the U.S. now has more beer styles and brands to choose from than any other market in the world.

More than 3,400 breweries are responsible for the beer brands available in the U.S., with 99 percent fitting the Brewers Association's small and independent craft brewer definition.

These craft breweries have had many successes and challenges, but they could not have developed their reputation as producers of the world's best beer without the support of beer lovers globally.

Having experienced as a home brewer, Lorenz faced few challenges other than working full time and having a family and making time to take on these courses. "Thankfully I have a very understanding family," he noted.

He hopes the WCCCD certificate leads him to work at a brewery or the ability to go into business for himself. "With craft beer exploding and the number of small breweries opening up today, having a program that is accessible to people and taught by industry insiders is a large step up in the community of brewers and it has the potential to really hit a market that is saturated with inexperienced people," said Lorenz.

"In a program like this, all of the business, science and technology can meet the art of brewing and turn into a wonderful and delightful beverage. Craft is what has been coined 'the great equalizer' by Joe McClain, president of the Beer Institute, 'Beer is a unifier and equalizer'".

Mr. Dotson added that the Craft Brewing Program “gives students the knowledge and training that will help them to be employed in a micro-brewery or to open their own business in this rapidly-growing industry.”

(Photo: Justin Riopelle, master brewer at Detroit beer co and teacher of the craft beer program and Jason Lorenz on the Right) at the Detroit beer co.)

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