

# Ale & Hearty: Scranton Priest Brews a Special Lenten Beer

by John Lavenburg,  
National Correspondent

WILKES-BARRE, Pennsylvania — On tap in the Breaker Brewing Company main room, in between lighter pale and blonde ales with names like “Hey Man Nice Slacks,” and “Blondes Have More Foam,” is the “40 Days Doppelbock,” a darker style of beer created centuries ago by Munich-based Franciscan monks that Breaker has made special for this Lenten season.

The beer was a collaboration between Breaker owners Mark Lehman and Chris Miller, and Father Brian Van Fossen for a Diocese of Scranton fundraising initiative.

For Lehman and Miller the beer was an opportunity to try out a new style of brew for themselves and their customers, and to support a good cause.

For Father Van Fossen, though, there’s a significant communal, faith dimension to the beer, a dimension that’s far more significant for him personally than the simple fact that his name is on the beer’s label, though he acknowledges that’s “super cool,” too.

“When you think about the Church and you think about community and you think about how Christ brings us together on a Sunday worship, or just the work that we do in order to help other people, you see that working in this,” said Father Van Fossen, pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish and St. Faustina Kowalska Parish in the Diocese of Scranton.

“One of the beautiful things about [Breaker] is the sense of community, the growth of that community, and when that community comes together how it makes a difference in our world today,” Father Van Fossen explained. “So, yes, it’s super cool to have my name on a beer, but it’s also a great opportunity to work with them, and bring people together.”

The Diocese of Scranton initiative the beer was made for is “Rectory, Set, Cook!” It’s a fundraiser where priests cook a dish on video, and then people vote on their favorite one. Each vote costs a minimum of \$10. Half of the voting dollars go to the parishes; the other half goes to people who are hungry and homeless.

The initiative began Feb. 13, and runs through March 26. As of Monday, March 18, the initiative had raised \$160,455.57 in contributions from 1,843 contribu-



Chris Miller (left) and Mark Lehman are the owners of Breaker Brewing Company. They created a “40 Days Doppelbock” beer for Lent, an ode to the 17th-century monks who created the beer style, in collaboration with Father Brian Van Fossen. (Photos: John Lavenburg)



tors. Sandra Snyder, the Diocese of Scranton director of foundation relations and special events, anticipates this year the initiative will raise north of \$200,000 when all is said and done.

The “40 Days” beer is Father Van Fossen’s entry in the initiative. Father Van Fossen and Snyder had originally planned for him to create a cocktail for the competition (in part because of his bartender background from before he was a priest).

However, because Father Van Fossen, Snyder, and Lehman all knew each other from high school, Snyder had the idea for them to partner together on a beer for the initiative.

Then, with everyone on board, Father Van Fossen researched beers that might work for Lent, and settled on the Doppelbock because the style was created in the 17th century by Munich-based Franciscan monks, who also drank it for sustenance during their Lenten fast.

Father Van Fossen passed his research on



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Above: Breaker Brewing Company is housed in an old Catholic church and schoolhouse. Right: Father Brian Van Fossen helped brew the beer. (Photos: John Lavenburg, Courtesy of Kristen Mullen)



to Lehman and Miller, who were eager to try something new. They had never made a Doppelbock before. Lehman describes the Doppelbock as a sweeter beer that’s malt forward, with notes of toffee and caramel.

“The cool thing with beer is coming up with new recipes, something you haven’t tried before, and so when it came to this we were following Father Brian’s lead,” Lehman said. “We looked at the modern Doppelbock from Germany, and that’s about as traditional as you’re going to get.”

Not only do they all enjoy the beer, but they said customers have, as well.

“It’s surprising. Most people want the traditional IPAs, and pale ales, stuff like that, and making this we’re really surprised by our own customers wanting this style also,” Miller said. “So it’s pretty cool to see that, and maybe we’ll start using some more traditional flavors.”

Of course, part of creating a new beer is also designing the can for it to go in. And in the case of the “40 Days” beer they chose a black and white image of a small Catholic church as the centerpiece of the label, which happens to now be the home of Breaker Brewing Company.

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## Bread, Water, and Bock Beer Sustained Monks

WILKES-BARRE, PA. — Breaker Brewing Company’s “40 Days Doppelbock” beer was inspired by the Paulaner Brothers, Franciscan monks who in the 17th century created the doppelbock style as a way for them to get sustenance during their Lenten fast.

A “bock” beer is a strong dark beer brewed in the fall and drunk in the spring. Doppel in German means double, hence a doppelbock is simply a stronger version of the beer.

Like most people in monasteries, the Paulaner Brothers were farmers. During Lent, they would go on a strict fast, only consuming bread and water for the 40 days. The fast, however, affected their ability to farm — making them lethargic, irritable, and drained of energy.

The monks sought a solution to this problem, one that would allow them to maintain their fast and the quality of work they did outside of the Lenten season. The solution they came up with was beer, specifically the doppelbock, which has a heavy carbohydrate content, contains antioxidants, but also is relatively light on the alcohol at about 7%.

Once incorporated into their fast, the monks drank the beer four times a day throughout the 40 days of Lent. Each day, they would drink it during their prayer cycles.

“So after they get done praying they would go back out and enter into the work that they needed to do, and they found out that they were much more capable of doing that work, they had much more energy, they were able to be fuller longer because of the density of the beer,” explained Father Brian Van Fossen of the Diocese of Scranton.

Father Van Fossen said through his research he found that younger people today have tried the doppelbock Lenten fast technique, and have had success.

“They found out that they had better clarity, they lost weight, they had a better sleep cycle,” Father Van Hos-



Lent doesn’t have to be time without booze. German monks came up with a diet that was quite the opposite.

sen said. “They just felt all around better as they tried this beer cycle and they were able to get much more done with a much more clear vision.”

The Paulaner friars are of the Order of the Minims, founded by St. Francis of Paola in southern Italy. They lived on Neuhauser Strasse, part of Munich’s old town.

They began brewing beer there for their own consumption in 1634. The bock beer, however, was allowed to be sold to the public on the feast days of the founder of the order, and it quickly gained local fame.

The monastery ultimately dissolved in 1799. Its buildings, located in what is today Munich’s district of Au, were converted into a prison. Then in 1813, master brewer Franz Xaver Zacherl acquired the former monastery brewery and continued the bock beer tradition.

The brewery, though with varying names, has operated since and still brews bock beer to this day. It now has the simple name “Paulaner Brauerei München” (Paulaner Brewery Munich).

In 2016 the brewery for the first time exported one million hectoliters of beer to the rest of the world. It is now consumed in over 70 countries worldwide.