

So Hyp'd



With his partners, Lance Lamb opened Sew Hop'd Brewery in the Union Special building with the intention of serving residents handcrafted beer while maintaining the history of the original establishment. (Photos by Christine Such/Sun Day)

Local business owners bring handcrafted beer to Huntley

Sew Hop'd Brewery opened its doors in Huntley April 27, 2019. Lance Lamb, one of the partners of the brewery, pointed at a large, three-panel stretched canvas reproduction of Borden's Dairy building in 1908.

"We wanted to remember the history of this structure," he said. "We found this picture and decided we had to display it."

Lamb explained the history of the location.

"This room you are standing in right now held the boilers which were used to heat that building. Coal was loaded up and brought here until the 1950s after it was purchased by Union Special."

How did the three owners of Union Special (Terry Hitpas, Tom Bartel, Lance Lamb, and longtime employee Doug Vandewalker) decide to open a micro-brewery?



Arched Original Doorway leading to Brewery from rest of Union Special building.

"The Union Special sewing operations have changed what they produce. There are 425,000 square feet in our facility. We were using less and less of our space. We started to rent out space. And an idea started to incubate and we realized we had a great opportunity to do something ourselves with space," Lamb stated.

Lamb explained the process behind opening up the business.

"In my position at Union Special I traveled a lot. Germany was one of those destination points and the colleagues there took us to their favorite craft brewery where we enjoyed some tasty ales. We wanted to bring fresh beer to our Huntley community."

Then, there was the task of revamping the building.

"It was tough transforming this space," Lamb said. "We had to take out the boilers, we had to cut them to get them out of the building. The walls were painted a horrible green and we wanted to expose the brick. This turned out to be one of our biggest challenges. First, we tried power washing it. That failed to take any paint off. We tried hydro-blasting the walls; it also failed. We got a referral to a company in Rockford that came highly recommended. They tried dry ice blasting. It didn't work either."

The situation looked hopeless at first.

"We were about to give up and paint the brick with a better color when they tried hydro blasting with silica sand. It worked. But the process was very time consuming since the over 100-year grout had to be protected," Lamb added.

The result is a beautiful and exposed brick wall. The partners were on their way to transforming the space.



Giving credit to his partner, Lamb shared, “Tom (Bartel) has done so much of the work. He stained a lot of the wood here. He ran the electricity. He built the shelves. He had a vision of how this place should look like. For footrests at the bar, he used pipes.”

Lamb points out the USB and Electric outlets at the bar and tables as well as the hooks for the purses.

“Our wives suggested those items,” he added.

The bar has a beautifully marbled piece. Sharing the secret, Lamb revealed, “Our tenants made the bar out of concrete and created the appearance of marble. Another tenant produced these beautiful tables made of hickory. The tables have 5 pieces of wood inlaid with waves of color. The tall tables have the logo lasered into one of the pieces of wood.”

The critical ingredient, of course, is the formula for the brew. They found that key also within their reach.

“Doug Vandewalker, Union Special Development Engineer did some home brewing and he became our Head Brewer,” said Lamb.

“We also got a lot of help from other local breweries and on our menu. We feature ‘guest taps.’ We have a ‘Beer Ambassador’ on staff that works with the breweries. We have printed menus and well as the one displayed on our screen. We have an app that updates our available stouts and ales not only here on the screen but our website also.”

The ales featured on the date of the interview had some clever names that tied in the operations of the sewing side of the plant with the brewery. You can try a ‘She’s Sew Blonde, a blonde ale, or a Borden Street Milk Stout – milk/sweet reminiscent of the building origin. And if you need a gluten-free ale, there is always one featured.

Lamb also explained the process of getting the flavor of the grain.

“We mill our own grain and the ‘spent grain’ we give to the area farmers to feed their livestock,” he said.

“We wanted to give the community something more than a bar. Come in and enjoy yourself. There is more to come. At Sew Hop’d our mission is to provide Huntley, Illinois with a taproom experience that makes everyone feel like family, a place where creativity and tradition blend to create craft brews that appeal to everyone who loves beer as much as we do.”
