

TONS OF OPTIONS

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Eugene may never surpass Portland as Oregon's Beervana, but it's definitely holding its own.

The latest entry in Eugene's beer scene is Sixteen Tons, a bottle shop at 265 E. 13th Ave. offering 300 different ales, lagers, lambics and other more rare and exotic beers, as well as 100 wines, plus organic chocolate and loose-leaf teas.

The shop is owned by Mike Coplin and Jeff Moores, as well as Coplin's wife, Kelley, and his mother-in-law, Chris Coleman. Coplin and Moores are childhood friends who share an affinity for fermented beverages.

"We just have always loved beer," Coplin said.

Sixteen Tons moves into a neighborhood with several other beer retailers, including Beer Nuts, a smaller bottle shop about a block away, and the Bier Stein, an often-packed bottle shop that also offers beers on tap and food, about two blocks away. And then there's the Circle K convenience store across the street.

Coplin said Eugene has enough beer drinkers and beer geeks to support another bottle shop.

"I don't think this is like some blockbuster deal," Coplin said. "We're just going to pour our hearts and souls into this place and offer good service.

"It's a great time for beer and a great time for wine as well."

Sixteen Tons, open Tuesday to Saturday, has daily beer tastings from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Customers pay \$2 to \$5 to compare different beers. On Thursday, for example, customers could compare three different imperial stouts brewed by the Great Divide Brewery.

"We're just trying to have a place that people can get information on different beers," Coplin said. "If they like a certain type of beer - say an IPA that has more of a citrus flavor versus a more bitter flavor, we can recommend something for them."

Sixteen Tons offers beers brewed locally, as well as more far-flung brews that defy the usual beer style categories, such as collaboration brews put together by different breweries.

"Lines are changing," Moores said. "Beer rules have been broken. No one feels restricted by styles."

The price of a 22-ounce bottle of beer ranges from \$2 to \$20. Wines run from \$5 to \$25, including bottles from local wineries, plus 25 or 30 bottles for \$8 or under - a price point intended to interest the younger wine drinker.

Coplin and Moores worked in restaurants before opening Sixteen Tons. They had talked about opening a bottle shop together but it wasn't until recently that things fell into place, Coplin said.

Coplin declined to say how much they spent to set up the 1,000-square-foot shop, but said it was done as cheaply as possible "to make it interesting and functional." Benches and counter tops were acquired from McKenzie Outfitters, which closed its shop in the Heron Building in February. The shelving also was used. A friend who's a carpenter finished the trim work. A local artist painted the sign out front. And the partners painted the interior.

The partners capitalized the business themselves, and left enough money in reserve so they can adapt their business as they understand better what their customers want, Coplin said. That may include adding beer on tap as well as food at some point, he said.

The name of the place is derived from Merle Travis' classic and much-covered song of a coal miner's lament.

"We didn't agonize over it," Coplin said. "We just thought it was a cool name."

Retail Notebook appears Friday in The Register-Guard. Tim Christie can be reached at tim.christie@registerguard.com or 541-338-2572.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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