

Barley's Angels Makes its Mark on Beer City

By Amanda Sterling, Access Editor



Harmony Brewing Company co-owner, Heather VanDyke and local artist, Rae Lang discuss "Liquid Art" at the inaugural Barley's Angels GR event, *Image courtesy of Betsy Verwys.*

When you live in the city that has held the Beer City, USA title without interruption since 2012, it's really hard to keep up with all of the beer-adjacent happenings going on in town! So, it didn't surprise me one bit when I learned that Barley's Angels, a women's craft beer appreciation group with chapters all over the globe, had slipped right under my radar. I recently met up with Betsy Verwys, one of the founders of the local chapter of Barley's Angels, to get the low down.

The Origin Story

While attending a beer tasting hosted by Gezellig Brewing Co. at a brew pub in Iowa in 2023, Co-founder, Michelle Gallery, was introduced to a Barley's Angels beer that was featured at the event. The organization piqued her interest and when she returned to Michigan and learned that there were NO chapters in the state at all, she loved the idea of bringing Barley's Angels to Grand Rapids to give women a space "to support each other and small businesses over a good pint."

Michelle was plugging along on getting the charter established when her spouse introduced her to a fellow Northview public school teacher, Betsy, also a craft beer enthusiast and one of the most can-do people you will ever meet. Once all the pieces began falling into place and the charter was established, Michelle, Betsy, and Co-Founder #3, Tracy Will, also the group's business manager, began to brainstorm about what sort of event to do for their official kick-off. After Amy Ruis from Art of the Table connected them to Heather VanDyke from Harmony Brewing Company in Easttown (kind of a no-brainer since she's been a co-owner in the craft brew business for almost 15 years and is no stranger to good craft beer herself) they were off to the races!

Betsy explained that the events hosted by the Grand Rapids chapter of Barley's Angels all have four key elements: excellent beer, delicious food, an educational component, and a philanthropic piece where a portion of event ticket sales are donated to a local charity. They figured if they were going to be gathering regularly, they

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Tourism Grant, Cont.

the local level; and Rachael Wingo, the President of the ECA Board of Directors, who is passionate about building stronger, more connected communities.

This project will also forge and strengthen connections between residents and visitors, raising awareness and appreciation of the ways in which the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians embody a deep understanding of community development. In doing so, it will acknowledge the sovereignty of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians while providing the neighborhood with a richer, deeper sense of belonging. With the renewed national interest in land acknowledgements and the contributions of Native Americans, the ECA believes it is time to raise awareness regarding the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians and their ongoing contributions to the City of Grand Rapids, the State of Michigan, and the nation as a whole. Our hope is that this will provide an initial step toward taking action to support the efforts of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians to promote their sovereignty, self-determination, and, ultimately, reaffirm their federal recognition.

Additionally, the nature of the project itself champions social inclusion, proactively engaging the public. Through text and illustrations created by a commissioned artist from the Grand River

Bands of Ottawa Indians, the historical marker and educational signs will reflect a fuller version of history. They will integrate a wider range of voices while publicly proclaiming that the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians persist and remain a vital part of our community.

Finally, this project offers a tourism community benefit that will ensure broad public benefits that enhance community life. The ECA envisions the site becoming a focal point for the increasing number of cultural heritage tourists who want to visit and learn about the places connected to the heritage of Native American peoples.

In terms of direct benefits to the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, the ECA imagines an educational sign that includes a QR code so visitors to the site can learn how to contact their legislator and tell them why federal recognition is so important to the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indian who continue to travel this path to this day. Our intent is that the ECA and Experience GR will promote, for free, tourism opportunities led by members of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians and host educational events and programs such as a group walk along the footpath. In short, the ECA hopes this marker and educational sign will afford an opportunity for the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians to share their story and priorities with those who visit this important site. ♦

Barley's Angels, Cont.

may as well do some good too, and decided to focus their philanthropy on organizations that address literacy and food scarcity in the community.

For their inaugural event in February, the theme “Liquid Art” emerged so they connected with Rae Lang, owner of the shop Woosah Outfitters on Wealthy Street, to ask her to talk to the group about her process for creating the can art that makes Harmony’s beer cans so special. Folks who have been to the taproom at 1551 Lake Drive were already familiar with Rae’s artwork long before Harmony started distributing their canned beer featuring her designs. Rae’s large scale, whimsical mural, which covered the exterior west wall of the brewery before the expansion (it’s now indoors in the main room) and her woodcut t-shirt designs were popular with the brewery’s patrons from the very beginning. The sold-out event was a huge success and the team has been on a roll ever since after hosting events at City Built Brewing on Monroe Ave in April and Brass Ring on Eastern in May.

Betsy beams as she tells me all about the upcoming summer event on Tuesday, July 22 at Arvon Brewing on Division Ave. Dubbed “Pints and Recreation: where craft beer meets the great outdoors,” this will be the group’s largest undertaking so far. Barley’s Angels will have the entire brewery to themselves and will hear from invited speakers from the retail shop Feral Outdoors and the Grand Rapids Parks Department. To get a ticket before they sell out (which is often the case), and to learn more about their VIP program, check out their website barleysangelsgr.com. ♦

