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Brewers talk about how to save BTUs while making beverages

By Ryan Carpe



Photo Credits: Ryan Carpe
Photo Caption: From left, Saul Kilorys, John Najeway, Art Oestrike and Kyle O'Keefe take part in a Zero Waste panel Thursday as part of Brew Week.

Ohio brewers and Athens community members shared their thoughts on sustainable energy practices at the Zero Waste Assembly Thursday morning as part of Ohio Brew Week.

The summit was an open discussion about waste reduction for Ohio businesses, and emphasized sustaining globally conscious practices. "It's a great way to partner with the community, and reach out to Ohio businesses," said Kyle O'Keefe, waste-stream development organizer for the Athens County-based non-profit, Rural Action.

Among the featured speakers were O'Keefe; Saul Kliorys, environment programs manager for Great Lakes Brewing Co.; John Najeway, owner of Thirsty Dog Brewing Co.; and local Jackie O's brew-pub owner Art Oestrike.

Former Ohio University official John Kotowski, who vice-chairs Rural Action's board of directors, introduced the members of the panel, which began by quickly offering practical options, such as reusing materials and

partnering with surrounding regions.

The Zero Waste Project focuses on eliminating waste by reducing energy use and recycling materials, and teams with local businesses for support. "Small businesses are the engines of local economies. They're the ones that employ and make an impact," O'Keefe said.

Many Ohio breweries such as Akron-based Thirsty Dog Brewing Co. have begun the arduous first steps to making their business greener. They renovated a vacant Akron brewery for their headquarters, and outfitted their brewery pallets and barrels for double-duty. "Adapting, reusing and recycling is what I've done all along in our business model, from recycling to equipment," said Najeway.

Other breweries such as Great Lakes recycle their spent grains and redistribute them to local farms as animal feed. Jackie O's re-uses its beer grains to make their pizza dough, which has become a local favorite. These simple strategies can result in big savings if added up over time, the panelists said.

These investments, speakers noted, are more vital than ever in an economy that isn't always kind to small businesses. And the cost of sustainable practices often force business owners to make tough decisions.

"Going green's not cheap. It's a huge initial investment, and that's one of the main problems," said Najeway.

Contributing to the problem, the panelists cited bloated government regulations and alcohol and licensing fees as slowing fresh-energy strategies. Local businesses must also deal with technology updates and paperwork instead of new green tactics, the panelists said. When business priorities shift to narrowly sustaining a profitable model, conservation efforts often take a back seat. Add to that an uneasy national economy, and the panelists said it's a serious challenge to successfully go green

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...the challenge to successfully go green.

But some breweries are thriving in the face of adversity, and many, such as Cleveland-based Great Lakes Brewing Co., have taken the challenge to a new level.

Ohio breweries are finding that sustainable business practices not only result in income reserves, but also bring new globally conscious consumers to your product. Kliorys of Great Lakes explained that customers are clamoring for breweries that go out of their way to go green, citing a recent customer survey that showed patrons were more likely to support Great Lakes because of its sustainable activities.

Oestrike of Jackie O's noted that local conservation strategies generate positive returns for breweries. "A brewery is the center of a community, and becomes a forum for discussion and debate," he said. "The more you're doing these kind of things, the more the community supports you. If you're working with local farms and organizations, then you're getting it (back) at the cash register."

Great Lakes Brewing Company serves as a model for many smaller breweries, Kliorys said. It initiated a green business plan known as the, "Triple Bottom Line," which engages in economic, social and environmental practices that achieve a sustainable yet profitable business.

The brewery accomplishes its initiatives by using a 12-passenger shuttle bus to transport its employees, affectionately named the "Fatty Wagon." The bus runs entirely from oil that comes directly from the Great Lakes restaurant, which is originally used in its kitchen, he said.

According to Kliorys, Great Lakes also co-developed the largest urban farm within Cleveland's city limits, called the Ohio City Farm, which provides healthy local food options to the Cleveland and neighboring communities. The farm consists of nearly six acres, and uses the produce to provide healthy food options to its surrounding communities. The model is a simple, yet effective means to give back to its customers, Kliorys said.

Brewers are also finding that when conservation is a collaborative effort, the work is much more manageable, he added. "The craft brewing world is so fun because we share ideas within our community," Kliorys said. "Everyone works together in the brewing industry."

And as Ohio breweries and businesses strive for conservation, the panelists noted, they often find new friends in the race to sustainability.

The summit, held in OU's Grover Center, was co-sponsored by Ohio Brew Week, Rural Action, the Athens County Convention & Visitors Bureau, the OU College of Health Sciences and Professions and Tech Growth Ohio. Ohio Brew Week ended on Saturday.

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