The Ultimate Combo
Pizza, Beer and Weddings are all on the menu at North Fork Brewery

In this issue:
Name That Frame
Baby B
From Ground to Grounds
For many, arriving in Whatcom County is just one step along the pathway to a higher education. Fall brings fresh faces to Western to become part of the ever-growing student body, but even those who aren’t new may still find some things to learn.

This issue of Klipsun Magazine tackles life in Whatcom County from coffee to surviving college, local heroes to area attractions. There is even a photo challenge to test your knowledge of the surrounding community. We sought to provide a glimpse into our corner of Washington, teaching amateurs some tips while providing new insights to those who are a bit more established.

Life is about overcoming obstacles, learning lessons, trying new things, exploring the world around you and having fun. In these pages, I hope we have shown even a glimmer of that.

In the five years I have been at Western, I have found the best education exists not necessarily in textbooks or even physics class, but in the decisions we make and their outcomes. We live in a beautiful place, so explore it. In the words of the great Ferris Bueller, “Life goes by pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”

Thanks for reading.

Sincerely,

Erin Dewey
Editor in Chief
Bobbi Crowell is a super senior visual journalism major from Centralia, Wash. Her passion is photography and the process thereof. She likes to tell stories with her pictures. The best pictures, Bobbi says, melt your heart and fixate your attention.

Ciara O’Rourke is a senior journalism and French major. She has worked as the managing editor and designer for Klipsun, and managing and news editor for The Western Front. She will graduate in spring 2008.

Matt Gagne is a senior journalism major with a concentration in geography. He will graduate in the fall after losing his soul as Editor in Chief of The Western Front. His interests include backpacking and capping it off by drinking beer and eating pizza.

Allie Rock is a journalism major with an emphasis in public relations. She is getting her minor in art history. Art is her favorite thing to learn about. She also loves Harry Potter. She will graduate in the spring of 2008.

Matt Gagne wants to be a beekeeper to satisfy his endless fascination with bees and to satiate his taste for good honey when he grows up.

Jani Nygaard graduated in August with a degree in communication and a minor in journalism. Jani would like to thank everyone who contributed in both positive and negative ways to her college experience, without which this story would not have been possible.

Reduce, Reuse, Restore

Lauren Ross takes a look at the store that welcomes unwanted building materials.

Building Up Broadway

It takes a community to raise a child. Sarah Martin discusses the future of the Broadway Youth Center.

Weaving Willow

Lauren Ross takes an intimate look at the art of basket weaving and one woman’s decision to make herself a new life.

Now @ Klipsun.Wwu.Edu

From Ground to Grounds

The Buzz About Mead

A College Student’s Guide to Sanity

Name that Frame

Baby B

I Now Pronounce You...

NOW @ KLIPSUN.WWU.EDU

KLIPSUN WOULD LIKE TO THANK BILL HOWATSON, HEATHER STEELE, CRAIG WOOD AND THE REST OF THE STAFF AT WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING SERVICES.
Won't find too many cowboys resting their feet in this joint.

Dirty days on a clean street.

These guys haven't had their...
New to Western? Trying to explore Bellingham? Here’s a fun way to do just that.

The Historic Downtown Fairhaven district and downtown Bellingham are full of wonders. There are shops, both new and old, consisting of cafes, burger joints, Mexican restaurants, world famous taverns and much more. Some buildings are decades old, while others are new.

The challenge is to identify all the buildings and pieces of art shown here. The winner will receive a $25 Downtown Dollar gift certificate. Deadline is October 31, 2007. Please send your submissions to Klipsun Magazine c/o WWU, 516 High St. MS-9163 Bellingham, WA 98225 or to klipsun@wwu.edu.

No one in or involved with the Klipsun magazine publication may enter to win.

All the pictures were taken in the summer of 2007 by Bobbi Crowell.

A nice way to tell what time it is when shopping for beads.

If you’re thirsty, pump it up. If you’re bored, watch a movie.
Minutes before giving birth, Sarah Weg and her husband Brad learned that one of their twins, "Baby B," had Down syndrome.

Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal abnormality in humans, and affects families' daily lives. Ciara O'Rourke spends time with Sarah Weg and her family, including 4-year-old son Tucker, who has Down syndrome, and witnesses the obstacles and triumphs they encounter. Photos by Ciara O'Rourke. Design by Molly Jensen.

After seeing her 4-year-old son Tucker onto the school bus, Sarah Weg was surprised to receive a phone call from his teacher a few hours later, announcing he was ill. Sarah said he had seemed healthy that morning, but his teacher insisted he wasn't himself and was moping around the classroom. Sarah drove to Northern Heights Elementary School in Bellingham to retrieve her son.

By the time they arrived home, Tucker had recovered and Sarah realized what was really wrong.

Her husband Brad was home after spending a week away on business. Tucker wanted to play with his dad.

Sarah called it a success. The couple spent the rest of the day playing with their son. Sarah was almost gloating as she and her husband celebrated their son's mischief.

"Already at four, he's learned to fake sick at school," she said, smiling.

When Sarah was pregnant with Tucker and his twin sister Samantha nearly five years ago, she wasn't prepared to give birth six weeks early. Her monthly ultrasound revealed Samantha had stopped growing toward the end of October 2002. Doctors at the Swedish Medical Center in Seattle confirmed the ultrasound's results, and on Nov. 19, ordered Sarah to stay at the hospital on bed rest. Sarah needed a Caesarean section.

As doctors prepared to perform tests tracking the twins' lung development, Sarah and Brad agreed to test the twins for Down syndrome as well. After a near perfect pregnancy with few complications, the Wegs weren't worried about the test. But Sarah knew something was wrong when the doctors approached her to talk 20 minutes before her Caesarean surgery.

"Baby B," as they referred to Tucker, had Down syndrome, a disorder Sarah and Brad knew little about.

Sarah's first response was to ask the doctors if Tucker would survive. And then she cried.

On Nov. 21, 2002, the twins were born. Like so many benchmarks to come, Samantha emerged first, and Tucker second.

Sarah and Brad hoped the results were a mistake, but when Tucker was born the physical characteristics were undeniable.

Doctors can often identify Down syndrome in babies at birth. More than 50 mental and physical symptoms distinguish individuals with the disorder, including poor muscle tone, slanting eyes, low-set ears, a short neck and a small head.
Sarah helps Tucker eat his quesadilla after breaking it up into bite-size pieces for him.

Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal abnormality in humans. It results from the development of 47 chromosomes instead of the normal 46, a condition doctors refer to as “trisomy,” meaning three chromosomes. In Down syndrome, or “Trisomy 21,” the number-21 chromosome doesn’t separate properly during meiosis, resulting in the fertilized egg having three number-21 chromosomes instead of two.

Sarah was scared. She didn’t know what to expect.

Today, Sarah runs down her driveway to meet Tucker as he gets off the bus. A head of spiky brown hair and a Finding Nemo backpack bobs past the windows toward her. Tucker climbs down the steps and takes his mother’s hand.

She smiles as he recites lines from “The Lion King.” She asks if he had a good day.

“Yeah,” Tucker says. Sarah asks what he did at school.

“Good,” he says.

Sarah reminds him that “good” is usually the answer to “how are you,” and repeats her question.

“Played,” Tucker says.

They reach the foot of the stairs leading to the family’s living room. Samantha is waiting at the top.

“Tucker!” she shouts.

Tucker smiles at her and scrambles up the stairs. The two tumble around the room.

The doctors allowed Sarah to bring Samantha home two weeks after her birth but Tucker stayed at the hospital for another three weeks, where Sarah taught Tucker how to nurse. Samantha had already learned at home. Now almost five years old, Samantha’s just starting to understand that her “little brother,” as she refers to Tucker, learns most things slower than she does, Sarah says.

“Ice Age, Mommy,” Tucker calls.
Sarah collects the backpack he abandoned by her feet and heads toward her son's voice.

Tucker is standing in front of the family's DVD collection, pulling the movie from the shelf. Sarah stops him. It's almost time for lunch. Tucker whimpers his complaint but his face lights up as his older brother Hunter, 8, slinks into the living room. He shrugs off Tucker's attempts to wrestle before giggling and joining in. Tucker says something to his brother that Sarah can't understand.

“What did he say?” she asks.

“He said, 'What's up, dude,' ” Hunter says. Sarah laughs. Hunter traps Tucker between his legs.

“I'm training my kids to be advocates for him,” Sarah says. “And they will.”

Tucker's disability doesn't stop him from trying to be like his brother and sister, Sarah says, as her children bounce around the living room. Tucker refuses to be excluded and isn't afraid to vocalize his unhappiness when he feels rejected.

“I hope he keeps that up all his life, because then he'll never be left out,” Sarah says.

But Sarah does worry Tucker will feel left out as he and his siblings get older and Hunter and Samantha spend more time with their friends.

When Hunter was planning his, Tucker and Samantha's future as parents, Sarah debated whether to tell Hunter she didn't think Tucker was going to be a daddy someday. Sarah opted to tell him, maintaining her philosophy to be honest with Hunter, instead of letting him figure out Tucker's disability on his own.

“It broke my heart,” Sarah says. “It's those little things that stab your heart when you least expect it. That pain of knowing that's not going to happen.”

Regardless, Sarah holds high expectations for Tucker within the realm of his abilities. Individuals with Down syndrome develop and learn more slowly than non-disabled children, but the degree of retardation varies from mild to moderate to severe — most children born with Down syndrome experience mild to moderate cognitive delays, according to the National Down Syndrome Society.

Tucker started speaking when he was 6 months old and today he can combine several words in a sentence. He recites lines from his favorite movies, but he's still too shy to speak much at school. His teachers only hear him talk in two-word sentences.

Tucker was still learning to talk when Samantha was speaking in complex sentences. Using sign language and speaking verbally to help Tucker learn to communicate is Sarah's number-one priority. As he struggles to accomplish skills Samantha grasps easily, Sarah struggles to resist comparing the two. She has to remind herself to separate Tucker's abilities from his twin sister's.

But as Tucker's teachers and peers accept him into the community, friends, family, and even Sarah, forget he has a disability.

“He can do anything anyone else can do,” Sarah says. “It just takes a little more work.”

Samantha was 14 months old when she began to walk, but Tucker didn't take his first step until he was 2-and-a-half. He could stand, though. One night after Sarah and Brad brought Tucker home from the hospital, where he spent two weeks for pneumonia, they steadied his body to stand and he took two steps toward Sarah. Sarah cried with joy. Tucker fell back to the floor, startled by the attention.

“It was an equalness with him and Sam that I was looking for,” Sarah says.

Tucker didn't walk again until that summer. Melanie Mack, a graduate student earning her master's degree in experimental psychology at Western Washington University, was working for the Wegs as a nanny while Tucker was learning to take his next steps. Melanie says Sarah would stand in front of him, smiling, pumping her hands in the air to encourage him.

“She just seems in awe of him,” Melanie says. “She just takes so much joy in all the little victories he has.”

“It broke my heart. It's those little things that stab your heart when you least expect it. The pain of knowing that's not going to happen.”

— Sarah Weg
Now at lunch, Sarah sits with Tucker, Samantha and Hunter, at the kitchen table. The menu today is Top Ramen, quesadillas and fruit. She breaks Tucker's quesadilla into bite-size pieces. He's still learning how to eat.

"It's a joy to watch him pick up a spoon and just put it in his mouth," Sarah says. "It's hard to explain that joy."

Before Tucker, all Sarah knew about people with Down syndrome was that their physical appearance was different and they were developmentally delayed. She didn't know what Tucker would be able to do.

Sarah had heard of Down syndrome support groups but couldn't find any in Bellingham. She called parents to organize an outreach program and started a committee with eight to 10 other regular volunteers, most of whom were mothers of children with Down syndrome.

Since she started volunteering as the coordinator for the Down Syndrome Outreach of Whatcom County three years ago, Sarah and her fellow volunteers have raised more than $20,000 for the organization, which provides events and support groups for families and friends of people with Down syndrome. After leaving her position as coordinator in July to move to Idaho with her family this summer, Sarah left a fundraising tradition in her wake.

"She just seems in awe of him. She just takes so much joy in all the little victories he has."

— Melanie Mack

A Buddy Walk Sarah had seen in Seattle inspired her to push for the same reputable program in Bellingham. Today, the 1.25 mile walk through Maritime Heritage Park promotes awareness for people with Down syndrome. Participants will collect financial pledges for the outreach program on this year's Buddy Walk Oct. 6.

Sixty-one friends and family members joined the Wegs for the first Buddy Walk Sarah organized three years ago. For Sarah, the support was invaluable.

"Until you're actually walking in the shoes, it's hard for people to understand what our life is really like," Sarah says. "Just as a child feels it's different, the parent feels it's different."

After finishing his meal — successfully spooning the Top Ramen into his mouth — Tucker tries to leave the table. He's the only one still seated. As he pushes his chair back from the table Sarah stops him. He didn't ask if he could be excused. Tucker scowls.

"What do you say if you want to leave the table?" Sarah asks. Tucker places his hands in front of him and stares ahead. He tries to push his chair away again. Sarah stops him. She calls to Hunter and asks if he can show Tucker how to excuse himself from the table. Hunter runs into the kitchen and plops back into his seat.

"Mom," Hunter says. "May I be excused?"

Sarah asks Tucker if he knows what to say.

"May I be excused?" Tucker says.

Sarah praises and excuses him from the table. Tucker runs to play with his sister.

Sarah follows her children to the living room. Samantha is dancing in the corner, Hunter is sprawled on the ground looking at a book and Tucker is perched on the couch, watching a movie. Sarah sits down next to him and playfully pokes for his attention. Unbothered by his mother's attempts, Tucker roars at the television — the Lion King is on.

"Tucker brings major joy to our life," Sarah says. "He opens the door to the real world."

Tucker nestles in the crook of Sarah's arm and she ruffles his hair. This time Tucker gives into Sarah's affection. Before returning his attention to the movie, Tucker turns to give his mother a kiss. 🎥
The ultimate combination of pizza, beer and marriage meld at the North Fork Pizzeria, Brewery, Beer Shrine and Wedding Chapel. Matt Gagne sits amid the hops-infused beverages, melting cheese and vows to discover the secrets behind the Mount Baker Highway's most intoxicating hideaway. Photos by Matt Gagne. Design by Brittney Leirdahl.
The harmony of melted cheese, crisp crust and a melody of toppings permeates the old building, muffled by the semi-sweet refrain of fermenting hops, barley and yeast. Amid the aria of aromas, offerings of pizza sit on raised platforms on each table covered in ceremonial white and blue checkered cloths. A hodgepodge of beer bottles, some dating back more than 100 years, makes a giant wall dividing the room in two. The bottles create a stained glass effect, appropriate because former content is revered to a level beyond the party-animal lifestyle stereotyped all-too often to college students. That reverence is reflected in the pizza and beer, taken nearly as seriously as wedding vows, and all three can be found here.

This reverent place is the North Fork Brewery, Pizzeria, Beer Shrine and Wedding Chapel. It sits innocuously along Mount Baker Highway, 20 miles from Bellingham in a setting that begets its sacred mission. The chorus of the Nooksack River and the baritone of Mount Baker add to the ambiance of the pizza and beer like no other place can.

Despite the majesty the shrine has a casual feel, as if entering someone’s home. The feeling is appropriate: owners Vicki and Sandy Savage have lived above the pizzeria and brewery the past nine years. “It’s got a real family atmosphere,” says David Johnston, a Bellingham resident who frequents the North Fork nearly every trip up Mount Baker Highway. “They have a perfect mix of being professional and laid back. They make you feel at home.”

Although convenient, the arrangement is not ideal. “In one sense you’re close to the business and in another you’re too close,” Sandy says.

Vicki and the rest of the staff make customers feel welcome with a casual grace that carries the tune of mountain hospitality. Several decks of cards, cribbage boards and other games dot the place, ready for anybody who dares to play.

But the building has its own lullaby, composed in its 97-year-old history. Careworn wooden floors creak in time with the thousands of footsteps that have waltzed through the century-old doorway. The large bar beats the drum of locals and tourists alike who seek the unique melody of North Fork brews.

The walls are decorated with beer advertisements from times past — some familiar, such as Olympia and Rainier beers, and others that hearken to a time long past. Strewn about are other, seemingly random objects, including a dueling sword and a collection of walking sticks. On one rafter is a battered helmet and spiked boots with a bouquet of dried flowers. Vicki says it’s a monument to her neighbor, a logger who had a tree fall on him. But it’s not a memorial of his passing. “He’s fine,” she says with a laugh. “He’ll probably be in tonight. He likes IPA and barleywine.”

**PIZZA and EXCHANGING VOWS**

While the production and veneration of beer is the main draw to the North Fork, its long-winded title has two other parts: pizzeria and wedding chapel.

The wedding chapel part of the North Fork’s name is no joke. Vicki is an ordained minister and has performed more than 100 weddings in the past seven years. Some are conducted outside near the North Fork sign with a backdrop of hop vines, or in the beer garden in back of the restaurant. In less welcome weather, nuptials are conducted inside the building among the ancient beer bottles and signs with the backdrop of a large, stained-glass window that hangs in the front of the shrine, mirroring the colored glass of the beer bottle wall.

Johnston said the pizza is some of the best he’s ever had, although the North Fork’s Web site modestly claims better slices can be found on the East Coast. The thin crust pizza topped with fresh ingredients is served at the blue and white checkerboard tables on a pedestal, as if in offering to the beer.

Johnston sings the praises of the other offerings on the menu, from the calzones to salads. “I just happen to love the pizza,” he says. “That’s where my heart’s at.”

**THE BEER**

“I have never pushed beer,” Vicki says to a patron at the bar as she slides him a taster of the E.S.B. “But it’s the sexiest beer we have on right now.”

-The Beauty-
ales, served English style at warmer temperatures than American brews and with much less carbonation.

Sandy, a graduate of the Siebel Institute of Technology and World Brewing Academy, designed the brewing system, which yields small batches of 109 gallons at a time — a scale unheard of by even microbrewery standards.

“It’s an intoxicating habit,” Sandy says.

Current brewmaster Eric Jorgensen says the system resembles those of homebrewers rather than production models. He should know — Jorgensen, 31, has been brewing since he was 17. The fermenters are open, which Sandy says allows them to watch and know what stage the beer in and how the brew is doing.

“For making beer its pretty labor intensive,” Sandy says. “We think it’s worth it.”

The brewery keeps six beers on tap (with another pouring root beer, also brewed on-premises). Jorgensen makes more than 12 beers, and the small batches allow him to experiment more than larger breweries are able. Different types of beers are on the way. Sandy and Jorgensen recently installed refrigerators, which will allow them to brew lagers that have to ferment at consistent colder temperatures. While their menu claims to stick to English-style beers, Sandy says they do not limit themselves.

“We have our own style,” Sandy says. “We just do what we do.”

What they do is brew barley wine, a beer that has a taste mimicking wine and puts hair on the chest of those who imbibe too much. Vicki pours pints of Son of a Frog, a dark red with aromas of chocolate and caramel that seems more like dessert than a beer.

The Pilgrimage

The North Fork is a bit out of the way, but the pilgrimage is worth it for more than the pie and beer. Highway 542, which winds along the Nooksack River under the shadow of majestic Mount Baker, entrances locals and visitors alike. Johnston says the scenic drive is coupled with opportunities for multiple interests, including gambling at the Nooksack Casino or intertubing on the Nooksack River.

“It’s a beautiful country you’re up and in,” he says.

Although some homes are near the shrine, there’s no real town to speak of at the North Fork’s location. The shrine gets its name from the north fork of the Nooksack River, which rumbles on the other side of the highway. Deming, along with the casino, are a few miles to the south, and the small town Maple Falls is cast along the highway, nestled firmly in the mountains.

Sandy says the shrine has two busy times of year — summer, when the sun and long days bring people to the mountains for hiking, biking and other recreation; and winter, when the snow brings skiers and snowboarders to the slopes of Mt. Baker Ski Area. But the North Fork also has a faithful local following year round, a patronage that Sandy says keeps the place alive. Even during the off season, the North Fork has a lively atmosphere.

“Everybody comes together,” Johnston says. “There’s lots of laughter, lots of eating and drinking. It’s that perfect thing after a long day in the mountains — or hell, after a long day of work. There’s nothing like it.”

Being unique serving some of the most common food and drink in the West is a challenge. Brew pubs and pizzerias are nearly as common as coffee shops. But the North Fork stands apart, and not only because the shrine is far away from any major population. Its character is infused in the building, pizza, beer and service in a way that cannot be duplicated.
The 5-foot-3-inch bride, Sarah Schwartz, uses a stool to kiss the 6-foot-7-inch groom Nicholas Connor. The Western alumni married on the steps of Old Main this summer on July 7, 2007.

PHOTO BY MARK MALIJAN
Roasted beans poured into cooling tank, which has a fan blowing cool air and an arm which stirs the beans constantly immediately following the roast.

Wendy de Jung silently bends over to smell a cup of coffee, she quickly moves on to the next of 16 cups she will smell, taste and evaluate. De Jung is Director of Coffee for Tony's Coffee and Teas Inc. and is blindly testing four types of coffee to make sure they have the exact aroma, flavor, acidity, body and after taste expected. This daily evaluation is what coffee roasters call "cupping." "Cupping" begins with brewed coffee roasted and ground beans brewed and ready for drinking.

"The idea is to be as unbiased as possible but I have a pretty good idea of what I'm tasting," de Jung says.

This process is how Tony's Coffee and Teas Inc. makes sure that every blend of coffee that goes out of their Bellingham roasting plant is perfect for brewing.

Following the evaluation of smell, de Jung will continue the process with "slurping" each cup of coffee and rate its body and after taste. She will dip a spoon into each cup bringing only a few drops to her mouth which she will quickly inhale.

"Slurping is the best way to get the full flavor of the coffee," de Jung says. "This turns it into a gas to really get to the pallet."

As the director of coffee, de Jung has been working in the coffee industry for over 20 years and is responsible for working with farmers and coffee brokers to get the best quality bean out to the customer. Traveling to farms around the world to buy from mostly organic farmers who pick the fruit off the tree at the perfect time, wash and ferment the fruit to bring it down to the bean is just the first part of the process. Once the beans are delivered to the Bellingham roasting plant they will be blend ed, roasted, ground and packaged right before shipping out to the customer.

It takes just 14-16 minutes for the light green pea size bean to transform into a dark rich bean whose smell can fill the room in an instant. The giant roasting machine will hold 100 pounds of beans which will reach up to 400 degrees depending on the blend to be roasted and be cooled down to room temperature in three to four minutes. After being roasted the bean is ground, packaged and shipped as soon as possible. Tony's will do as many as 45 roasts in a day depending on how many orders they need to fill. For the freshest tasting coffee, de Jung recommends brewing the coffee within 10 days of it being ground.

But this process begins long before roasting and grind-
ing. For many in Bellingham beginning the day with a cup of coffee may seem like the continuing of an American tradition. However Bellingham’s coffee comes from all over the world and the culture of this morning drink began centuries ago and is thought to have begun in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is just one of the places Tony’s Coffee and Teas Inc. finds their beans to distribute throughout Bellingham and around the nation.

“Ethiopia had some of the most beautiful farms I’ve ever seen,” de Jung says.

Throughout the year de Jung will make five to 10 trips to form relationships with new farmers and keep up with existing growers. Tony’s receives daily shipments from places like Columbia, Guatemala, Kenya, Papa New Guinea and Mexico. One of the things Tony’s looks for in buying their coffee is making sure the growers are picking the beans at their perfect ripeness. The fruit should not be picked before it has a rich dark red color which will ensure the best flavor.

“You can not make the flavor any better than it already is, you can only maintain it,” de Jung says. “It is just like any other fruit.”

Because Tony’s wants their beans to be the best they buy from farmers who routinely visit each tree to pick only the ripe ones. Often farmers pick all the fruit off of the tree at once but going back to pick only the ripe beans will give the drink the best flavor and consistency. This is what drinkers of Tony’s coffee appreciate, like Kathleen Martin who drinks a cup every morning.

“I’ve tried Starbucks and Haggen but I always come back to Tony’s,” Martin says.

Like many others in Bellingham Martin comes to Tony’s Coffee Café in Fairhaven. The café is the original location of Tony’s Coffee and Teas but is now its own independent business. Tony’s Café is just one of many places around Bellingham that uses beans from Tony’s Coffee and Teas. The last part of the bean journey is turning the beans into brew. Tony’s Café makes sure the high quality care from the roasters is continued up until drinking.

“ My number one objective is not to get people through the line but to make good coffee,” Tony’s Café manager Amy Moe says.

While making drip coffee from the coffee maker is simple at home, the journey of the beans can be very long and the process very precise all to ensure the best coffee experience.

- Allison Rock

Design by Brittney Leirdahl
Vikings conjure images of muscled women and men scantily clad in metal and furs with pointy helmets decorated with even pointier horns. Rarely, if ever, do Vikings evoke sweetness and honey. But the horned pillagers drank sweet honey liquor, called the drink of the gods — one of the oldest drinks since humans discovered the pleasures and pitfalls of alcohol.

They called it mead. And Vikings were not the only ancients to sip from its bounty. Ancient texts in Greece, Ireland and Scotland mention mead in stories intertwined with the culture. The Bible mentions mead in its pages. Ancient Hindu Vedas hint at mead as well: “Adhvaryus, make the sweet libations ready, and bring the beautiful bright juice to Vayu.” Mead’s legend remains current as well.

Amid battles between Voldemort and Harry Potter, characters in the popular series also imbibe a bit of mead.

But what is mead?

“I knew what it was from trashing my college GPA from old English literature classes I took for fun,” says Denice Ingalls, owner and brewer at Sky River Mead in Sultan located along Highway 2 in the Cascade Mountains.

Although mead is like wine, its taste has the sweetness of honey, not the tartness of grapes. In truth, mead is made from honey, although variations of the liquor are as numerous as a hive of bees.

“I don’t think there’s any hard definition of what mead should be,” says Robert Arzoo, the brewer at Bellingham’s Honey Moon winery. Arzoo brews four types of mead, but experiments with other varieties as his mood and supplies suit him.

Ingalls began brewing in the mid-1990s with the idea of straying away from the traditional super-sweet mead available at the time.

“One of the Achilles heels of mead is that it has been so sweet that it doesn’t fit on a dinner table,” she says. “But it’s a common drink with a long legacy. We knew it could be done well.”

The legacy of mead is interwoven with Honey Moon’s name.

“It does hearken back to how old mead is,” Arzoo says, adding that the name derives not only from the honey used in its creations, but the tradition of sipping mead in post-nuptial celebrations. “On a honeymoon, people would drink mead to encourage fertility. I think humans have had an interest in making alcohol as long as they’ve been around.”

Honey Moon has its own tasting room in the alley behind the Pepper Sisters at 1055 N. State St. In what used to be the glass warehouse for Morse Hardware, those who know come and sample the fruits of Arzoo’s labor. Arzoo co-owns the winery with his wife Nana Thebus and another Bellingham couple, Murphy Evans and Anna Hall Evans.

Bartender Linda Melim says sometimes people who come in for the first time are disappointed by the lack of a normal bar’s stock of alcohol, but between the sweet mead, wines and hard cider, people usually find something to their liking. Still, some struggle with flavors like the Ruby Mead, with its blood-red color and dry, raspberry flavor.

“Either people really like it or they don’t,” Melim says. “There’s not a lot of people in the middle of the road. It’s usually the more adventurous ones that are willing to try something different.”

Variations often come from the type of honey used in making the libation. Bees that pollinate fields of raspberry will yield honey perfumed with the fruit. Other variations come from additions to a regular mead. Honey Moon’s orange mead, which won the bronze medal in the 2007 International Mead Festival, is brewed with tangerine peel to provide a distinctive tinge to its sweet taste.

“It’s up to the winemaker to make it interesting,” Arzoo says.

Arzoo crafts Honey Moon’s four meads on a regular rotation. He also makes different types of
Honey Moon recently ran out of blueberry mead, a flavor that Melim says was popular and hopes Arzoo brews again.

Honey Moon is one of the few mead breweries of the half-dozen in the Western United States that uses oak aging in its process, giving the mead a distinct aroma and flavor that complements its sweet side.

Making mead is surprisingly easy, although it does take the same time and attention most homebrewing requires.

Arzoo says mead fits the homebrewing ethos, as most people brew to make products not readily available on grocery store shelves.

The ingredients are simple enough: water, honey and yeast. Arzoo says the trick is to find a combination of the three that yields a balance between sweetness, alcoholic content and body. Like beer and wine, what constitutes good mead is up to the brewer. Arzoo says some like it with more sweetness, and some like higher alcohol content. He strives for a medium sweetness in the Honey Moon meads.

Regardless of what people look for, the recipe for mead is as ancient as humans. Mead lays claim as the world’s oldest alcohol, and knowledge of the drink is embedded across cultures. Honey has a nearly unlimited range where bees produce it in different climates around the world and can be found year round.

Grapes have limited regions of growth, and harvests come once a year. The availability of barley, the main ingredient of beer, limits the times and range of brewing. But honey has a universal quality, giving mead a unique characteristic that comes not only from the sweetness of its taste, but that people can brew it any time of year worldwide.

Ingalls says people often have trouble categorizing mead — references to the liquor are strewn throughout modern and ancient history, but few people actually know what the drink is. But mead is resurfing into modern culture. In 1992, when Ingalls began thinking about starting a meadery, only four or five existed nationwide. At the 2007 International Mead Festival in Denver more than 70 national meaderies were represented.

“It’s fun watching people learn about it,” Ingalls says. “It’s beginning to become less of an unknown to people.”

Mead is time-tested, and its flexibility, simplicity and availability of ingredients will ensure its tradition, even if the popularity of the drink waxes and wanes.

— Story and photos by Matt Gagne
Design by Molly Jensen
The sun sinks into the Pacific Ocean off the Oregon coast on a muggy July 3, 2007.

PHOTO BY BOBBI CROWELL
College life induces stress and plenty of it, with maintaining that GPA, choosing the "right" major, finding the "right" partner and worrying about the future after graduation, among other things. But have no fear, you can easily decrease your stress and maximize your enjoyment with a few easy steps. These are the top five lessons learned outside the classroom that I wish someone had told me sooner.

1. Do not choose your best friend as a roommate. Chances are, you will not remain best friends for too long. Though it may seem like a good idea to share a small space with the person you get along with the best, it's not. Living, eating, breathing and just straight being in the same space day in and day out is bound to cause tension. You will need your best friend to vent to when your roommate gets drunk and eats all of your Pop Tarts or when their significant other browses through all the files on your personal computer when you're away. Trust me, you will want to vent and you will regret not having your best friend available for this purpose.

2. Get a cat (or two). College is a stressful time for everyone so anything you can do to relieve some of that stress is good. Cats are calming, low maintenance and relatively cheap. If you don't spend much time at home, get two. They like the company. Most apartments allow tenants to have cats with a small fee to cover any damage they may cause. The fee is worth it. There's nothing like coming home after that final you stayed up all night cramming for to find this tiny creature waiting to curl up in your lap and finally sleep. Hard to stress out with a cat in your lap. If you have a rough day, you can cry, complain, whine and be as upset as you want to your cat. Cats also provide a good audience for speech or presentation rehearsal. They will be happy for the attention no matter what kind. A cat also won't judge you when you get drunk and eat all of your roommate's Pop Tarts.

3. Get a job. Even if you don't need one, having a job is a fast and easy way to meet new people and make new friends outside of school, which is especially important when you live on campus. Any excuse to get out of the dorms for a few hours each week will help you. Having friends outside of school who will offer new and different insight into things will make you a more well-rounded person. Having a job while in school also teaches you invaluable time management skills that will come in handy when you land a job in the real world. The extra spending money is a nice bonus, too.

4. Explore. Bellingham is really more interesting than it seems if you take the time to get to know it. One of the biggest mistakes I made was waiting till my junior year to discover all this town has to offer. Even if you just take a walk down a different street each week, you'll find something interesting and worthwhile such as the ever-expanding graffiti walls (or your neighbor's garage door), quirky houses and lawn ornaments or a park you never knew existed. Bring a camera, too. The photo-ops are endless.

5. Get involved. Western offers a vast array of intramural sports and a broad spectrum of clubs to appeal to just about anyone. Again, finding ways to get out of the dorms and meet new people will make your college experience more enjoyable. For those living off campus, being in a club or playing a sport offers a nice break from roommates, homework, work, or boredom.

Whether you follow one, none, or all of the above pieces of advice, one thing is for certain: do not get drunk and eat someone else's Pop Tarts. Everyone involved is better off.

—Jani Nygaard
Design by Kyra Low