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WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT PLANNER

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A 'Gansett comeback? He'll drink to that – and he won't be alone

Beer drinkers of a certain age are welcoming an old friend back to Maine.

Narragansett Lager, which from the 1940s to the early 1970s was the top-selling beer in Maine, is now being sold at some Portland bars and some of the larger beer stores.

Mark Hellendrung, a life-long Rhode Island resident, bought the brand from Falstaff Brewing Co., and started brewing the beer almost on a whim.

"About seven years ago I was with a buddy of mine and we were getting to the next round," Hellendrung said. "Nothing was inspiring us all that much; we had tried everything before. Then we said, 'We need a Narragansett. We haven't had that in decades.'"

"Pretty soon, the whole bar was talking about 'Gansett and Curt Gowdy and how it sponsored Red Sox baseball. This was a truly historic brand, and it didn't exist anymore."

He said the effort to revive Narragansett "kind of took on a life of its own."

Hellendrung has some experience with beverages – he was involved early on in Nantucket Nectars, a juice company, and worked for a while at Magic Hat, a Vermont brewery.

His next job was to find the recipe for the original Narragansett, which did not survive in written form. But he did find Bill Anderson, the last brewmaster for the company, alive and well in California, and Anderson told Hellendrung that the only place the recipe existed was in Anderson's head.

Once the formula was set, the brewing began, mostly at High Falls Brewery in Rochester, N.Y., but also at a smaller brewery in Pawcatuck, Conn. The Cranston, R.I., brewery of olden days is gone.

In the first few years of Narragansett's revival, the company focused its marketing in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, but now is looking to expand into Portland, which Hellendrung calls "one of best-quantity beer towns in New England."

Narragansett now, as it

**The much-loved
'Gansett is back ...**

was in its heyday, is a mid-range beer. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was less expensive than Budweiser, Miller and Schlitz but more expensive than some of the lesser brands. A six-pack of 16-ounce Narragansett cans costs about \$6, plus tax and deposit at Downeast Beverage on Commercial Street.

It also is mid-range in flavor. "It's in between a Budweiser and Sam Adams," Hellendrung said. "It's a lot lighter than Sam Adams, and has a heck of a lot more body and flavor than Budweiser."

My tasting would agree. The beer was a very light golden, with a pure white head that stood up well. The new 'Gans-

ett seemed to have fewer hops than I remembered from decades ago, but I thought that could be because I am drinking hoppier beers now. But Hellendrung said he did lower the IBUs, or International Bittering Units, a bit from the original recipe.

Still, the malt-yeast combination did have the sweetness and grain flavors I remembered, and it had less carbonation than a lot of the big-beer-company products, especially Budweiser, which has too much carbonation for me. Narragansett is a beer I will put in my rotation, and not just for nostalgia.

The good news goes beyond the lager, however. Narragansett is introducing seasonal beers. A fest or marzen-style beer is coming out now for fall but has not reached Maine yet. There also will be a porter for summer and a bock for spring.

I don't remember having the fest or porter in the old days. I did have Narragansett Bock once, loved it and could never find it again.

I'm already looking forward to spring.

SEBAGO BREWING CO. will be introducing its Local Harvest Ale from 5 to 7 p.m. Sept. 16 at its Portland restaurant, 164 Middle St. It is made with two-row barley from Aroostook County and hops from Irish Hill Farms in Monroe.

Staff Writer Tom Atwell can be contacted at 791-6362 or at tatwell@pressherald.com

... a little less hoppy,
but still great.



Tom Atwell
What Ales You

