



A TOAST TO CHARITY

FINNEGANS BEER HELPS FIGHT POVERTY

By Holly Dolezalek

It takes the geniuses of this world to connect beer-drinking to charity. Jacquie Berglund, the owner of Finnegan's Beer, is one such genius. Every time you drink a Finnegan's Irish Amber, you can enjoy the buzz and know that whatever profit Berglund realizes from your bottle or tap will go to organizations that fight poverty.

The beer is made with potatoes and three varieties of malt. It's full-flavored and light-bodied with a creamy finish. "It's amber in color and very drinkable," says Berglund.

Finnegan's Beer is a for-profit corporation that's run like a nonprofit. The company brewed 4300 barrels last year, and the beer is being poured or sold in 475 bars or restaurants and 600 liquor stores in the company's distribution footprint. Finnegan's pays its bills, including a salary for Berglund, and then donates all profits to the Finnegan's Community Fund, a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

The fund, in turn, takes grant applications from agencies in Minnesota and Wisconsin that fight poverty. Twice a year, the board of directors for that fund (Berglund doesn't have a vote) award grants of \$2,000 apiece to the applications they feel will use the money well.

Berglund's decision to go into business to do good came from her own experience and from those of others. "My parents didn't have a lot of money when I was growing up, but I also remember volunteering at the St. Stephens homeless shelter and meeting men who were getting up at 3 or 4 in the morning and sometimes working 7 days a week, yet they still couldn't make ends meet," Berglund says. "That's just wrong."

Finnegan's Beer has no full-time employees except Berglund, and only three part-time interns. The company is run almost entirely by

volunteers. "Having volunteers donate their time reduces administrative costs, allowing more to go back to the community," says Erin Kratochvil, PR director for Finnegan's.

There's Finnegan's Brigade, volunteers who pour samples for potential customers at tastings. Other volunteers work on functions for the corporation, such as marketing or PR or creative. Volunteer directors lead those functions. The directors, who apply for their positions and occupy them for one year, are at the highest level of the Finnegan's volunteer career path.

"I had gone to many events as a patron, and not a volunteer, but now I volunteer for as many events as I can," says Tina Glenn, communications director for the company. "I am helping create a sustainable change for those affected by poverty, and I have fun doing it!"

The company has donated \$126,000 to the fund since 2003, which is when it first became profitable. But \$30,000 of that profit came in 2008 alone. And the company does fundraisers as well, raising \$10,000 last year from its Finnegan's ShamROCK event, which is coming up again on June 6. (For more information about this event, go to www.finnegansshamrock.org.)

The fund doesn't accept any government grants. "I'm a big believer in sustainability, and I don't believe we should look to the government or only nonprofits to fix our communities," says Berglund, who started the company in 2000. "Everyone should pitch in, including business, and I think it's important that wealth that is created in a community comes back to that community." ♣