

Saranac, Black and Tan boost upstate brewery

By CRAIG McGUIRE
Gazette staff writer

Combine the growing demand for a specialized taste with a recent string of well-received products.

Call it success, because that's what's happening at the F.X. Matt Brewery Co. in central New York.

It is the kind of brewery that has been going out of business in recent years. But F.X. Matt is now moving in another direction, thanks to Saranac and Black and Tan.

Saranac, a premium stout produced at the brewery, won the super premium

category at the 1991-92 Great American Beerfest.

"Armed with that success we began producing the Black and Tan," said Robert D. Kelly, director of trade and community relations, referring to a blend of Irish stout and German lager.

The blend was an overall success following its early June debut.

Kelly said the raising of the drinking age, health concerns, and the tendency for people to go out more and drink less have caused the beer industry to shrink.

However, micro-breweries such as F.X. Matt in Utica which produce highly

specialized blends are enjoying success.

Kelly, also an Oneida County-elected official, said the painstaking, time-consuming process "makes no economic sense" for large breweries like Anheuser-Busch.

"We are small and have the time to produce this product."

The new products produced by F. X. Matt, founded in 1888 by a German immigrant, have been well received by the public.

So much so that F.X. Matt will be forced to ration Black and Tan to distributors, for instance, as they gear up for the busy Fourth of July weekend.

"Now, we're desperately trying to address the market we opened."

Not everybody is thrilled with the new product.

Kelly said the brewery has received at least two angry letters protesting the name.

The term "Black and Tan" also refers to members of the police force in Ireland in the 1920s who brutalized the people on orders from the English.

Kelly said that the name refers exclusively to a specific beer category.

According to Kelly, the future for the F.X. Matt Brewing Company is in expansion, using Black and Tan as its lead point.