

Montgomery Advertiser

# METRO & STATE

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MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2013

## LEGISLATURE

# Issue coming to a head

### Hobbyists hope home brewing makes final hurdle: the Senate

By Brittany DeLong

Special to the Advertiser

A group of Montgomery residents settled into their scheduled meeting to discuss matters of upmost importance — life, family and home brewing.

Members sat with different bottles of home-brewed beers and wines, but each with the

same hope: that one small piece of legislation, House Bill 9, will take one more step toward passage — allowing them to legally practice their favorite pastime in Alabama as those in 49 other states already can.

Once a month, members of the local home-brewing community meet to share expertise and to critique one another's

techniques of brewing. The cost to sit in is a bottle of your own product to share with the group.

The conversations in this meeting at the Railyard Brewing Co. varied from the bill that would legalize home brewing to suggestions on what to fix in the sampled beers and what ingredients were used.

"It's like a car club," local home brewer Keith Grant said. "It's not just about the beer — it's about the community aspect of it."

The head brewer of the Rai-

lyard Brewing Co., Kade Miller, allows the group to meet in the basement. Miller started as a home brewer more than 15 years ago.

The meeting attendance ranges from about 15 to 30 individuals from different occupations and with varying experience in home brewing.

According to American Homebrewers Association there are an estimated 5,000 home brewers in Alabama, despite



The Alabama House has passed a bill that would allow home brewing in the state. BRITTANY DELONG/SPECIAL TO THE ADVERTISER

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the state being the only one in the nation to prohibit the practice.

House Bill 9, the "Home Brew Bill," could change that.

Home-brewing bills to legalize the creation of home-brewed beer and homemade wine have been introduced numerous times and failed.

But after a lengthy debate Tuesday evening, the Alabama House of Representatives voted 58 to 33

to approve the bill, which allows enthusiasts to create — but not sell — a limited amount of beer and wine in private residences located in wet counties or municipalities.

Rep. Mac McCutcheon, R-Capshaw, championing home brewing as a "rights issue," helped it pass despite both opposition and attempts to add amendments to weaken it.

The bill permits people 21 and older to produce up to 15 gallons of home-brewed beer, mead, cider or wine for personal use every three months with certain restrictions. The sale of any of the home-brewed beverages would still be forbidden and no one convicted of a felony could engage in home brewing.

The bill also passed the House last year, but was defeated in the Senate.

Still McCutcheon said he is optimistic it will pass the Senate this year.

"There's more legislators that are educated on the issue now than there were last year, and I think the support will be even better this year," he said.

Even with the restrictions, opponents question whether this bill would provide an opening for more alcohol abuse.

"First of all, I'm anti-alcohol," said Rep. Richard Laird, I-Roanoke, who has consistently been against the bill. "If you look at the damages alcohol does to families, alcohol kills more people than our wars.

"I'd just like to see a little more oversight into the legislation."

The possibility of alcohol abuse has weighed heavily into McCutcheon's decision to back this bill, he said, but this is not something people do just for the consumption of alcohol.

"This is more or less a hobby, an art form," McCutcheon said. "There are people that abuse things and alcohol is a drug that has been and will continue to be abused."

Surveys conducted by American Homebrewers Association, information available on their website, have shown that the majority of home brewers have technical or professional occupations, have college degrees and serve as examples to others for how to consume alcohol in a responsible manner.

"You can abuse milk, beer, wine," Grant said. "You can't legislate morality. Just because it's a law doesn't mean people aren't going to abuse it."

It's not certain whether the home-brewing bill will pass the Senate. What is certain is that if it does, there will be 15 to 30 hobbyists offering up toasts at a meeting at the Railyard Brewing Co.

*Troy University journalism student Brittany DeLong of Goshen wrote this story as part of a project partly funded by the Alabama Press Association Journalism Foundation.*

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