

THESE BOOTS WERE MADE FOR BREWING

MIRELLA AMATO
WWW.BEEROLOGY.CA

When Tonya Cornett stepped up to the stage and accepted her award for 2008 Champion Brewery: Small Brewpub Category, at the World Beer Cup in San Diego, I felt myself jump up to my feet as I began to cheer. Behind me, Laura Ulrich called out “she’s a pink-booter”. I could tell, in that moment, that we were both thinking the same thing: She’s a very talented brewer and she’s one of us! As of 1pm that day, I too was a member of the Pink Boots Society...

Earlier that day, April 19th, a group of us (16 brewsters and 6 women beer writers) who were in town for the Craft Brewers’ Conference, gathered at Gordon Biersch for the first ever meeting of the Pink Boots Society (PBS): a guild that unites women working in the brewing industry worldwide.

PBS is the brainchild of Teri Fahrendorf, who left her post as Brewmaster at Steelhead Brewing Co. last year to embark on a cross-country tour, visiting (and brewing in) as many breweries as possible along the way. While on the road, she had a string of experiences that lead her to realize that a society of women brewers was necessary. She explains: “A lot of breweries invited me, and I didn’t know this but they had young women brewers and that’s why they invited me. They wanted their women brewers to meet me.”

The decisive moment for Teri was when she met Laura Ulrich at Stone Brewing Co. “She enjoyed meeting me so much. I realized that it’s important for older women with careers, experienced women, to connect with those young guys so that they feel like they’re not the only ones.” Laura agrees. When she first met Teri, she realized that she had never really felt confident in her job at the brewery: “I felt unsure. I felt like this is an industry where [guys] should know better than me. And I know that that’s a really bad cliché, but that’s the way I thought before I met Teri. I had never met a female brewer before. I just picked her brain and I wouldn’t let her go.”

Teri began keeping track of the women she met during her travels, and posted the list online. When the e-mails started pouring in from women around the world, asking for more information on the PBS, Teri decided to hold a meeting, with Laura’s help, in order to give PBS members an opportunity to vote on the structure that they wanted the society to have, and to share ideas about future projects and events. Laura took great care in setting up the private room at Gordon Biersch. The décor was decidedly girly: pink napkins on the table as well as pink flower arrangements which were soon joined by an assortment of pink rubber boots, worn proudly by the attending brewsters.

Hayley Meagher’s feelings reflect the general atmosphere at the meeting that afternoon: “Meeting other women brewers from other parts of the country: that’s exciting. Because there are so few of us it’s nice to have the opportunity to get together and get to know each other. Wouldn’t miss it. Gotta be part of it.” As the time came to vote on who might qualify as a Pink Boots Society member, the general concern was to encourage and support as many women as possible. Carol Stoudt, from Stoudt’s Brewing Co. shares her point of view: “Years ago, when I was alone on the shelf, it really wasn’t fun. Larger brewers put their arms around me and helped me. I’ll never forget that, and I think we need to do the same thing... It will help women in general, uplifting them”. In the end, it was decided that female brewers, cellar women and lab techs from breweries of all sizes are voting PBS members, and that any other woman “who derives at least part of her income and livelihood from beer” is also included in the society.



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When asked about her “she’s a pink-booter!” shout-out at the World Beer Cup, Laura Ulrich explains: “I was already on a high. There was so much drive, spirit and imagination leaving that meeting. Tonya winning that award just capped the night.” After accepting the award, Tonya Corbett soon found herself surrounded by PBS members, all of whom she had met for the first time a few hours earlier “There was a lot of screaming and jumping around, some crying, typical girl stuff.” says Tonya “I definitely felt a feeling of camaraderie with these women and it just goes back to how much excitement they had, that positive energy. To me that was one of the best parts of the night.”

There is still a lot to be decided about the structure and direction of the PBS (the next meeting will take place in October at the GABF). Still, there is no denying that the April 19th meeting had a strong positive impact on all members present. Brewer Jessica Gilman beamed: “I bet there hasn’t been a meeting with this many women brewers in hundreds of years... it is historic”. As all of these women return to their brew houses, the confidence, solidarity and momentum generated by the PBS will certainly radiate a positive energy throughout the brewing community. In the words of Carol Stoudt: “in all facets of beer production, you see a ton of females and I think it’s great...The men and beer drinkers just embrace us and I think it will help bring more people into craft beer.”

To see a current list of Pink Boots Society members (or to add someone to the list) and keep up with the latest news, visit the PBS website at: <http://www.pinkbootsociety.com/>.

