

Beer sales brew aid for burn camp

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By **JOHN MAJESKI**
STAFF WRITER
jmajeski@thnt.com

NEW BRUNSWICK — This ale's for you, James D'heron. Patrons of Harvest Moon Brewery/Cafe raised their glasses Sunday to honor the second anniversary of Jimmy D's Firehouse Red, the beer named for the city firefighter who died at a house fire in 2004.

A portion of George Street was closed to accommodate the overflowing crowd.

"What they do to keep his memory alive is fantastic," said brother Bill D'heron, 57, who came up from Florida for the event. "It's just fantastic."

The late D'heron, who was known as Jimmy D, rushed into a 3 a.m. house fire on Lee Avenue on Sept. 3, 2004. The 51-year-old deputy chief was the first responder at the scene. He wore no protective gear when he roused 15 residents to safety before being killed when a propane tank ignited.

The Irish-style red ale was created in January 2005, said proprietor Frank Kropf. Pints were \$3 Sunday, with \$2 of each sale going to support the Connecticut Burns Care Foundation's children's burn camp, at which D'heron had planned on volunteering prior to his death. Normally, Kropf said, 50 cents of each Jimmy D's pint goes toward the camp.

Kropf said to date more than \$23,100 has been raised from the special brew.

"It's number one or two in sales each month," said Kropf, who did not personally know D'heron. "It's become a staple."

Kropf said the drink not only honors D'heron but also serves as a "tribute to all firefighters and emergency-services workers" who regularly put their lives at risk.

Richard Popilowski, executive director of the foundation, said last year the camp served 61 children, all of whom have survived life-altering burns. Located in a rural setting in the Constitution State, the camp provides young victims with physical and social activities aimed at improving self-worth. Operating expenses are \$153,000 a year, Popilowski said.

"Very unique, quite different," Popilowski said of raising funds through an honorary beer.

The late firefighter's daughter said her father would have fully supported the charitable aspect of Sunday's event, though he was on the "quiet" side and would have been "in the corner doing his thing."

"My father was a great man," Erin Varga said. "He always taught us to give back."

Although there is an ale named in his honor, Varga's father was a recovering alcoholic of nearly 20 years.

City firefighter Kevin McCann, who was in the first platoon with D'heron, stood sipping the red ale yesterday.

"It's just a great way to remember Jimmy," he said of the event. "He would love something like this."

Sayreville's Leo Bonkowski didn't know D'heron but didn't need to either. He read about the fallen firefighter's story in the newspaper.

"He was a great guy," he said.



AUGUSTO F. MENEZES/Staff photographer

Jimmy D's Firehouse Red is on tap Sunday at the Harvest Moon Brewery/Cafe in New Brunswick. The beer is named for fallen city firefighter James D'heron.