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A legend on tap

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New Brunswick firefighter James D'heron was known for his courage and endless desire to help others. Three years ago, he lost his life trying to save 15 people from a burning building.

D'heron's legacy of giving to others lives on with an Irish beer, Jimmy D's Firehouse Red, named in his memory at Harvest Moon Brewery on George Street. For every \$4.75 pint of beer sold year-round, 50 cents is contributed to the Arthur C. Luf Children's Burn Camp in Union, Conn., where D'heron wanted to volunteer.

Harvest Moon will host an event Sunday celebrating the second anniversary of the brew's introduction. At the event, pints will be sold for \$3, and \$2 from each beer goes to the camp. George Street will be closed from 2 to 7 p.m., heated tents will be set up and the Middlesex County Police and Fire Pipes and Drums corps also will perform.

"We have firefighters visit from around the state asking for Jimmy D's Firehouse Red year-round," said Frank Kropf, one of the pub's owners. "We couldn't stop carrying it even if we tried. We have it on tap every day."

Kropf described the brew as hoppy and similar in style to Killian's Irish Red. At last year's event, Harvest Moon sold 1,800 pints and raised \$4,000 for the children's burn camp. The brewery also sells window decals and T-shirts in honor of D'heron to benefit the camp.

Richard Popilowski, executive director of the Arthur C. Luf Children's Burn Camp, said Harvest Moon and those who support D'heron's memory play a central role in funding the organization, which costs \$153,000 to run for one week each summer.

All campers are victims of life-altering burns -- some covering up to 95 percent of their bodies -- and more than half of the 86 counselors are firefighters, Popilowski said. Harvest Moon has donated over \$23,000 to the camp as of December.

"When you see these kids, it's a heart-stopping scenario," said Popilowski. The 61 campers last year came primarily from the Northeast, though some of the campers traveled from Russia and Puerto Rico.

"It's very touching to see these children having a chance to be themselves and do what kids do without worrying about bandages or what the rest of the world thinks," Popilowski said.

The idea for a tribute beer came to Kropf and his partners when they saw 1,000 people turn out for D'heron's funeral in 2004 as they were preparing to open their restaurant.

"Just to see so many people come out for a man who was so obviously great was amazing," Kropf said, "We thought he shouldn't be forgotten with the passage of time."

D'heron, who had been deputy fire chief since 2001, was known by fellow firefighters as a gregarious and honorable man who loved surfing, cigars and golf.

"I remember his passion for wanting to do things the right way," said New Brunswick Fire Department Director Robert Rawls. "He saw to it that everyone got a fair shake and equal rights."

D'heron's son, Michael, recently followed in his father's footsteps by joining the city's fire department in August.

His three grown children and his wife Kathleen have created a foundation and 5K run on Labor Day weekend, the anniversary of his death. The event raises money for Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston and the children's burn camp in Connecticut, which he had fallen in love with.

"My dad had just found out about the camp and was trying to get his platoon involved," said Erin Varga, D'heron's daughter. "We thought, if he can't get there, let's get money in his name there."

D'heron, a 24-year veteran of the city's fire department, was a recovering alcoholic and would have celebrated his 20th year of sobriety in 2004, Varga said.

"I know, it's ironic," Varga said of the beer named after her father. "But he was such a giving person. He would do anything for anyone, and I feel him giving us energy to do more. If it was for a good cause, which this is, I know he'd be there drinking seltzer with us."

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