

Intercourse inspires beer business

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By [Deborah L. Cohen](#)

CHICAGO (Reuters) - Nicole Courides has a passion for Intercourse. She has to - it's her business.

Courides founded the Intercourse Brewing Company (intercoursebrewingco.com), which she named after the rural Pennsylvania Amish community of Intercourse, ironically a dry town. The name always prompted giggles whenever a younger Courides, who grew up about an hour away in Collegeville, visited with her parents.

It was also hard to ignore the suggestive names of surrounding towns: Blue Ball, Mount Joy and Bareville.

"I couldn't believe no one had done it yet," said Courides, at 23 one of the youngest independent brewers in the United States. "The town names are just so funny, and it's real."

In college, Courides set her idea in motion, using a business class to develop a marketing plan for the venture. It wasn't until after graduation that she used an investment from family to produce her first brews, which she began selling in 2008.

Courides made her first test batches in her parents' kitchen. She then convinced The Lion Brewery in the city of Wilkes-Barre to prepare them commercially on a contract basis.

"By no stretch am I a professional brewer," said Courides, who for years worked part-time in restaurants and later brewpubs, piquing her interest in beer. "I did a ton of reading."

'SEX IN A BOTTLE'

Operating as a one-woman, home-based company, Intercourse Brewing has to date produced some 18,000 cases of craft brews under varieties that include Paradise Pale Ale, Mount Joy Light, Bareville Pilsner and Blue Ball Porter.

The beers, which retail for about \$25 to \$29 a case, have been well received in Pennsylvania, particularly in Lancaster County - that houses Intercourse - where locals get the joke. Growth has been slow but steady, said Courides, who reinvests her profit back into the business.

"The beer makes sense for us in this market," said Matt Kirchner, a Lancaster distributor. "As we speak, I'm totally out of stock."

Courides has deliberately played up the sexual innuendo in her marketing, using the slogan: "May your spirit be light and may you always enjoy Intercourse". She also designed t-shirts that read "I love Intercourse (beer)" and coasters announcing "Right now, I'm having Intercourse".

Even the logo is suggestive, featuring a barn with a silo flanked by two round shrubs. Courides maintains these promotional devices are "light-hearted," tongue-in-cheek efforts that stay within the boundaries of good taste.

"I didn't want to be crude," she said. "I didn't want to come off as promoting sex."

Regulators, however, took a bit of convincing, according to J.B. Brombacher, who runs the Duryea, Pennsylvania licensing business hired by Courides to obtain approvals for distribution.

"Are you serious about this?," Brombacher recalled was the email response from federal officials at the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, following an application for a labeling permit. After Brombacher produced maps showing Intercourse was an actual town, they reluctantly complied.

"I had to send them all this documentation that we're not selling sex in a bottle," he said.

CRAFTING A BUSINESS

The business is close to obtaining a license that will let Courides distribute Intercourse outside Pennsylvania. Just how well the product sells beyond boundaries where customers recognize its geographic link remains to be seen, said Denise Lee Yohn, a San Diego-based branding consultant. She points out that sexually charged marketing messages can sometimes limit a brand's appeal to younger male audiences.



"There are a lot of beer drinkers out there. Ones that gravitate toward a microbrew (are) a little older, a little more sophisticated, a little more refined," Yohn said. "I don't know whether such a brand would resonate with that target as much."

Craft beers have fared well despite the economy. In the first half of 2010, overall beer sales were down an estimated 2.7 percent by volume, while sales of craft brews rose 9 percent, according to the Brewers Association, a trade group for craft brewers.

"We're seeing increased shelf space for small brewers," said Paul Gatza, association director. "The price gap between a standard lager and a craft beer really isn't that much. Even during a time when consumers are hurting, they seem to be willing to spend a bit more."

It helps that Courides is a tireless spokesman for her beer, spending weekends at trade shows and local foodie events handing out samples where she sometimes battles the perception that the beer industry is still a man's domain.

"A lot of the time they think I'm the girl doing the promotions, doing the events and pouring the beer," said Courides, who earlier this year took a last-minute trip to New York City to get Blue Ball Porter included in Maxim magazine's list of 25 best new beers in America. "I believe a lot in the product."

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