

XL

Expectations



Photograph of the Detroit skyline courtesy of the Super Bowl XL Host Committee.

Beth Kurta '92 BS and Sean Krabach '94 BS talk about 'The Road to Forty' and how they got there.

By GEOFF HINEMAN '99 BS, '01 MA



Photograph of Beth Kurta and Sean Krabach courtesy of Beth Kurta.

“WHAT’S NEAT ABOUT HOSTING A SUPER BOWL IN A CITY IS THIS:” said Beth Kurta, “You know when you have company come to your house, you always keep your house neat and tidy? But if your mother-in-law is coming....”

That’s an adequate analogy for Super Bowl XL, as it promises to be the mother of all Super Bowls. All the high expectations and potential

pitfalls are certainly not lost on Kurta and Sean Krabach. As members of the Super Bowl XL Host Committee, they’ve both had their share of nail biting and butterflies.

The NFL has billed this season as “The Road to Forty.” Unlike most Super Bowls, this time around, the big four-oh will be in a cold-weather city rather than a standard Louisiana-Florida-Southern

California destination. In addition to the necessary attention toward security, possible snow removal, lodging, and entertainment management, of particular concern was the possibility that the combination of cold weather and an urban setting could prove a difficult obstacle in creating the hospitable atmosphere many Super Bowl fans have come to expect. For Kurta and Krabach,

though, their travels on the road to forty took the scenic route through Northern Michigan University, and they are using some of what they learned at NMU to help create what they refer to as a Super Bowl experience that is “authentically Detroit.” By embracing the cold weather, rather than trying to sidestep it, this Super Bowl experience is sure to provide many firsts.

For starters, Motown Winter Blast, Detroit’s pre-game winter festival, is a celebration that carries much more significance than simply acting as a precursor to the Super Bowl.

Kurta said, “When [the committee was] preparing for Motown Winter Blast, they were talking about snowshoeing and dogsleds. Sean and I said, ‘Wow!’”

Krabach chuckled. “Yeah, we know all about that. Everybody around here said, ‘Wow, I’ve never seen a dogsled.’ And Beth and I were saying, ‘None of this is new to us. Snow sculptures? No problem.’”

But Motown Winter Blast will feature much more than snow sculptures and dogsleds. There will also be a 200-foot snow slide, a snow maze, live entertainment, ice skating, laser light shows, a taste of Detroit, and more.

To be sure, the implications of an event like Motown Winter Blast are numerous. In addition to bringing people downtown in the winter, it is speculated that this event could do for Detroit what events like the North American International Auto Show and the Detroit Electronic Music Festival do for the city: place an international focus on a city that many Detroiters feel has gotten a bum rap for too long. Last year, as a “trial run” for this year’s big spotlight, the Motown Winter Blast drew

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an attendance of 250,000. If that is any indicator of its ability to spark interest, this year’s attendance could make it a permanent attraction.

So, how does one go from participating in Marquette Winterfests to helping stage events the magnitude of a Super Bowl? Well, if you’re Beth Kurta, you start by organizing.

You see, Beth Kurta likes to organize. Good thing, given the amount of organization it takes to host the most-watched single sporting event in the world. Upon graduation

with her bachelor of science degree in administrative gerontology, Kurta became a licensed nursing home practitioner and a certified director of activities. Her career saw her serving with Hospice of Michigan and as director of activities at various senior care facilities in the Detroit area. After taking some time away from her career to raise her two sons, Kurta found that her instinctual need to organize wouldn’t take a break.

“I’ll never forget this project—it was right after the holidays. I was alphabetizing my recipes and I realized that after that, I had nothing left to organize. My kids’ clothes are labeled in their bins by size, and separated as warm weather and cold weather. You see where I’m going with this?”

Since she was already at home with her own children, she had offered to babysit for others, and, through their kids, Kurta met Susan Sherer, the executive director of the Super Bowl XL Host Committee. Sherer learned of Kurta’s professional experience and instinctual ability to maintain order and asked her if she would like to be a part of the committee. Kurta was hesitant to drop everything and plunge back into the 40-hour grind, so she agreed to start with just 10 hours per week.

Sometimes, however, even the best laid plans are open to suggestion. Months before she was scheduled to be a full-time member of the Super Bowl Host Committee, Kurta got a call from Sherer.

“The plan was for me to start in June of 2003, which was still a year away. Then I got a call in October of 2002 asking if I could start full time in November instead of June. And I thought, this better not ruin my plans, because I’ve got

plans!” And with that, Kurta was on board as the committee’s executive administrator. Amid juggling the position’s responsibilities of office management, board of director relations, administrative staff supervision, charitable requests, and suite administration, she met up with another NMU alum—Sean Krabach.

As the volunteer services manager, Krabach knows a thing or three about organization as well. Perhaps it’s his experience in the sports industry as a member of the Detroit Metro Sports Commission, his communications/public relations roles with the Port Huron Border Cats of the International Hockey League, and his role as the IHL’s director of communications that gives him such assured confidence. Considering his duties include recruiting, training, and deploying approximately 10,000 volunteers, his measured speech and confident body language suggest a remarkable calm about it all.

“I knew the recruiting part would be easy because we have the Super Bowl, which is the greatest single sporting event in the world, and we have people who love their city and love their community. They just want to be involved.”

Don’t let his calm fool you; his is still a daunting task—as if helping to corral 100,000 fans could be seen as anything less. Still, Krabach uses something he learned at NMU to help him pull it all together.

“Don Rybacki was the head of my academic department. He was my adviser, so I could go to him with problems and he’d always find creative ways to make my program work. It wasn’t always easy, but we always made it work.”

In this instance, “making it work” has included tips he picked up from previous Super Bowl Host Committees in Jacksonville and Houston such as running major ads in local media outlets and scheduling dozens of training sessions that encompass responsibilities ranging from escorting fans from the airport, helping seat fans with disabilities, providing directions, and simply welcoming people to the event and to the city.

For executing her responsibilities, Kurta exuded the same appreciation for another member of the NMU community. “I learned a lot from **Dave Bonsall ’73 BS**. He was so encouraging. He just had such a great rapport with students and with his staff. And what I think about now is that he was in charge of a lot of stuff. He handled it with such grace and such a great spirit. I really appreciated that.”

Bonsall’s inspiration is something Kurta values deeply. She lifts her shoulders as she speaks on the subject, recounting college memories that helped shape her current life. “I was so fortunate. I was president of the Greek Council when I went to Northern. I was also president of the Pan-Hellenic Council. I would never have been able to do that at a big school. I would have been lucky to get into the sorority of my choice at a big school or to have any leadership roles. So I loved that about NMU.”

As the timeline moves from years to months to days, Krabach and Kurta get a little giddy when they talk about the sheer immensity of the task that lies ahead. “Every year, this event gets bigger and bigger,” said Krabach, spreading his hands farther and farther apart with each “bigger.”

“The game is always going to be the game. There are going to be between 70,000 and 80,000 people there every year. Now, however, it’s become so much more. Now a lot of people come to town who have no intention of going to the game, but they come to town anyway because they know it’s going to be a big party.”

“He’s so right,” echoed Kurta. “One hundred thousand people come into town, and only 70,000 of them will be at the game. That is a very big party!”

Because of this, even during game time there will be no rest for Krabach and Kurta. Both will be on duty making sure everything goes as planned. Kurta joked about sleeping in the Host Committee’s Ford Field office the night before the game. “You never know what could happen at the very last minute, so I’m probably going to be wherever I’m needed most, even if it means waking up in the office.”

Said Krabach, “I really wish I could sit back and enjoy the game, but it’ll probably be another day at the office, and I’ll be out somewhere with volunteers. And to tell you the truth, come February, I’m probably going to be doing all I can to take my mind off of football. Maybe I’ll take up crocheting or something.”

Still, in lieu of the would-be-could-be daunting job at hand, there’s an excitement that comes with anticipation. For their parts, Kurta and Krabach both seem prepared to do anything just shy of lacing up the cleats to help deliver a Super Bowl experience on a scale that has never been approached before. And the whole world will be watching. ■

The Whiteside of Life



Photograph of Jimmy Whiteside courtesy of Whiteside Communication Management.

Introduction by GEOFF HINEMAN '99 BS '01 MA

Whether it's planning pre-game ceremonies for the Detroit Pistons NBA Finals home games, handling event management for President Bush, or producing a crucial employee communications program for the DaimlerChrysler merger, Ferndale-based Whiteside Communication Management has proven it can handle just about anything.

Come February, **Jimmy Whiteside '85 BS**, president of Whiteside Communication Management, and the rest of his firm, will be producing the opening ceremonies for a week's worth of Super Bowl events. Before that, though, Whiteside took some time to talk with *Northern Horizons* about how a special someone at NMU changed his life, what it's like to play a part in the Super Bowl, and what it was about NMU that sticks with him most, even today.

Here then, in his own words, is Jimmy Whiteside.

"When I started at Northern, I was there on a football scholarship, and I wasn't the greatest student. I wasn't stupid, but if you looked at my academics, you would have thought so.

"One day, though, a life-changing event happened to me. Professor Karyn Rybacki pulled me aside and said, 'I don't think you have any idea of the wonderful gift you have. I don't think you have any idea how bright you really are.' She said, 'Wonderful things are going to happen for you.' My grades instantly went up, and I was an A-B student from that point forward. To me, her words alone were worth the cost of my five years of education. They sparked me then, and I've never looked back.

"As soon as I graduated from Northern, I got a job managing and representing talent. I had about 35 acts. Having become very successful in that arena, I decided to bridge over to the corporate arena and created a company designed to be a full-service company that was going to do meetings, promotions, and events. Today, 14 years later, it's been a great ride. It's not just about me, though; I have a truly great team here. I'm blessed with some of the best people in this industry. They are truly great at what they do.

"These days, we try to be selective with what we take on. We like to do projects where we feel we can make a difference. If we don't feel like we can start with an idea and take it out of the universe, then we typically don't get involved.

"To be selected from 26 companies around the country by the Super Bowl Host Committee, then, is such an honor. My team and I are completely jazzed for this Super Bowl. We are handling the opening ceremonies, A Detroit Salute, events with *Playboy* and Runners of the Game, NFL Media Night, a TSA VIP hospitality event, and so much more.

"Along this wonderful ride, what I still remember—and it's what I always loved about Northern—was that it seemed to foster a culture of people who were real. There is a genuineness to the Upper Peninsula culture. Throughout my career, I've tried to hold on to being true to myself and being genuine and real with people." ■

High Velocity Safety

By KRISTI EVANS



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As a teenager, **Curt Tucker '82 AT** craved the high-speed adrenaline rush that came from climbing on his cycle and tearing up the strip at the Tri-City Dragway near his hometown of Saginaw. Little did he know then that his penchant for motorsports would translate into a thriving career. But instead of flirting with disaster, Tucker now focuses on preventing it. He heads a safety equipment company whose products are designed to harness the potential horsepower-fueled hazards facing those who provide weekend racing entertainment for a growing legion of fans.

“WHEN RACERS FEEL SAFER AND DON’T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT TRYING TO BRACE THEMSELVES INSIDE THEIR CARS, THEIR COMPETITIVE LEVEL IS HEIGHTENED AND IT HELPS THEM GO FASTER.”
—CURT TUCKER

TEAMTECH Motorsports Safety Inc. is based in Saginaw. Tucker’s patented window netting and padded, multi-point seat belt restraints stabilize drivers—from local amateurs to INDY car and NASCAR professionals—enabling them to walk away from 210 mile-per-hour crashes.

“NASCAR racers buy safety gear through dealer networks, so we don’t always know exactly who uses our products,” Tucker said, “but I can tell you we’ve outfitted racing greats like Emerson Fitipaldi, Kyle Petty, and Greg Biffle, along with TV and movie stars such as Jesse James, Jay Leno, and Paul Newman. Our latest product design is a new latch buckle inspired by the fact NASCAR drivers are getting smaller. They’re able to tighten down their shoulder belts, but the lap belts remain pretty loose. This new buckle is so secure that the pelvic bone deflects a bit. It’s a significant development. After it runs through crash tests, it will go to NASCAR safety specialists. Jeff Gordon’s crew man-



Photographs of Curt Tucker courtesy of TEAMTECH Motorsports Safety.

ager e-mailed and said he wants to be the first to try it out in practice.

“We’ve been in business almost 18 years and haven’t had anyone break any bones or get any bruises. When racers feel safer and don’t have to worry about trying to brace themselves inside their cars, their competitive level is heightened and it helps them go faster. It’s a competitive industry, but with an estimated 2 million active racers of all kinds worldwide, we’ve found some niches.”

Tucker ships seatbelts on a monthly basis to Japan, where “drift” racing is the rage. This sport focuses not only on speed, but style. Drivers soup up their vehicles so they pack from 350 to 500 horsepower. The boost allows them to quickly traverse

the track while spinning the tires the whole time. The more noise and smoke they can generate, the more wildly receptive the fans become. Tucker said it’s the dry-asphalt equivalent of a controlled fishtailing joy ride through an icy, snow-covered parking lot in Marquette.

Road events comprise the bulk of his business, but Tucker’s client list veers off road, off shore, and away from motorsports altogether. He developed a head and neck restraining device for monster trucks to prevent whiplash from constant jostling in the cab. His company worked with others to design a fixture system for drag boat racers so they can disconnect from their belt buckle, air mask, and helmet radio simultaneously if they capsize and become disoriented. On a more personal and practical note, Tucker said his seatbelt technology has been adapted for wheelchair users.

“It’s a big hit, especially with the kids,” he added. “Generally there’s just a chest strap on a wheelchair, which kids don’t like because it can be uncomfortable. We scale down our design for this use, and parents say it is much more comfortable. It also gives kids a greater sense of pride because they’re using the same harness race car drivers use, and it makes their wheelchairs look fancy.”

Tucker said TEAMTECH would not exist without a timely assist from his mother, or the top-notch preparation he received at Northern. He graduated from the drawing and design program, but also acquired experience in welding, machining, foundry, electronics, and drafting. The diverse skill set enabled him to secure a job right out of school at a chemical, mechanical, and physical testing facility in Orange County, California.

“We tested everything from aerospace products down to plastic plumbing pipes for homes,” he said. “My mom always said I was destructive, but I’m sure she never thought I would get paid for bending, stretching, and crushing materials to make sure they adhered to standards. It was very interesting work. One of my biggest claims to fame, if you will, was that my boss and I were the technicians who worked on requalifying the O-rings for the space shuttle program. We didn’t test the first one, obviously, but we requalified them. They’re now made with silicone rubber from Midland, Michigan, and they’re working very well.”

The lab began testing race car safety equipment for the SFI Foundation, which sets minimum performance standards for motor-sport industries. There were no specifications for window nettings at that time, so Tucker drafted some.

“Out of 11 manufacturers we tested, not one of them passed. I was going to be tarred and feathered; the companies said my specs were too stringent. But I knew they made perfect sense. I asked my mom to sew one. She said she had only done drapes and wedding dresses but was willing to try, so I sent her the specs and material. Hers worked perfectly. The president of SFI almost fell backward in his chair when I told him my mom was the one who finally managed to pass the test.”

On her son’s advice, Elaine Tucker kept the specifications and started selling window netting to local drivers. Curt had begun testing race car seat belts at the Orange County lab and noticed a number of problems in quality, not to mention the lack of test specifications. In the process of completing upgrades and helping to write met-

allurgical and machining tolerance procedures, he began to develop his own ideas of what a seat belt buckle should and shouldn’t do for racers.

“I went to the tracks and talked to the drivers about safety,” Tucker said. “Then I designed my own seat-belt and showed it to manufacturers. They wanted me to build it for them, so I did. Things picked up quickly, and I decided to go into business for myself. I left the lab in 1989 and worked out of a garage for a couple of years before joining my mom in 1991. I always wanted to have my own business.”

Tucker received a patent for his padded seat belt and release buckle. His product line has expanded to include racing apparel and helmet or neck supports. He was even commissioned by Chrysler to develop tie-down straps used to secure production cars in boats as they are shipped overseas. Tucker’s two-pronged approach to product design is based on snippets of sage advice he received from NMU Professor Tom Meravi: keep it simple, and listen to and build around customers’ needs rather than telling customers what they need and giving them something that doesn’t work.

Meravi has remained a mentor and good friend of Tucker’s since 1982. The two talked for a long time about starting a Baja racing team at NMU—something Tucker had helped establish at nearby Saginaw Valley State University. Their wish finally came true last year.

“I had given some seats and seed money to help make it happen, and I’m just ecstatic,” Tucker said. “It’s huge for the university because these teams get a lot of international attention, and many companies headhunt at the competitions. Industrial sciences and engineering students typi-

cally are the matrix of the NMU Baja racing team, but you don’t have to be an engineering school to do well.

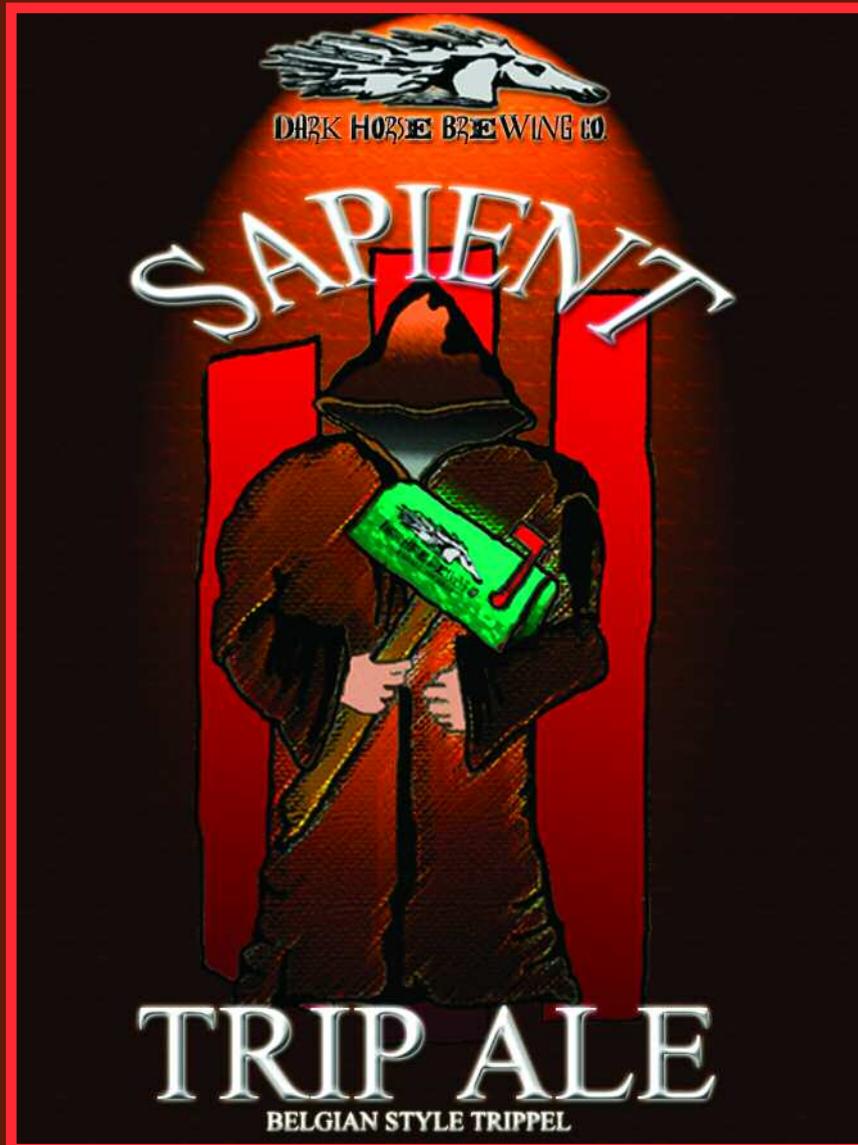
“We are attempting to get the whole of NMU involved in the Baja racing team because there’s also cost factoring, marketing, management, and other aspects involved in the judging. My wife (Korina) and I met the NMU team in Dayton, Ohio, for the competition. They scored in the top 10 in creativity out of 150 other universities that entered worldwide. The NMU vehicle was probably the most talked-about in terms of uniqueness, quality, and imagination.”

When asked to describe his alma mater, Tucker replied, “Northern is the college where relationships are built. The professors are available to students. And the industrial sciences program has great facilities for that hands-on experience manufacturers are looking for. Too often, universities pump students out with book smarts, but little ability to apply what they’ve learned. Northern prepared me extremely well for my eventual career.” ■



A Dark
Horse
Taps into
a Bright
Future

By KRISTI EVANS



Aaron Morse

Aaron Morse '97 BFA jokes that he hasn't exactly applied his art and design degree to his chosen occupation. But those who like to sample microbrews on a lazy Sunday afternoon might beg to differ. The ability to handcraft these specialties to achieve an award-winning combination of flavor, aroma, and texture is an art form unto itself. Besides, Morse has used his college-honed skills to design the company's logo and illustrate the labels on every bottled variety produced by Dark Horse Brewing of Marshall, Michigan.



Photograph of Aaron Morse courtesy of Matthew Dunn, Indianabeer.com

The origins of Morse's homebrew hobby can be traced back to his years as a Northern student. He confirms reports that he and some friends concocted batches in the basement kitchen of Halverson Hall. In hindsight, he would not condone similar exploits. However, he was willing to digress and provide details with no assurances of immunity or concerns about the statute of limitations on student code violations.

"We were tired of drinking the same old stuff, and money was an issue, so we came up with the bril-

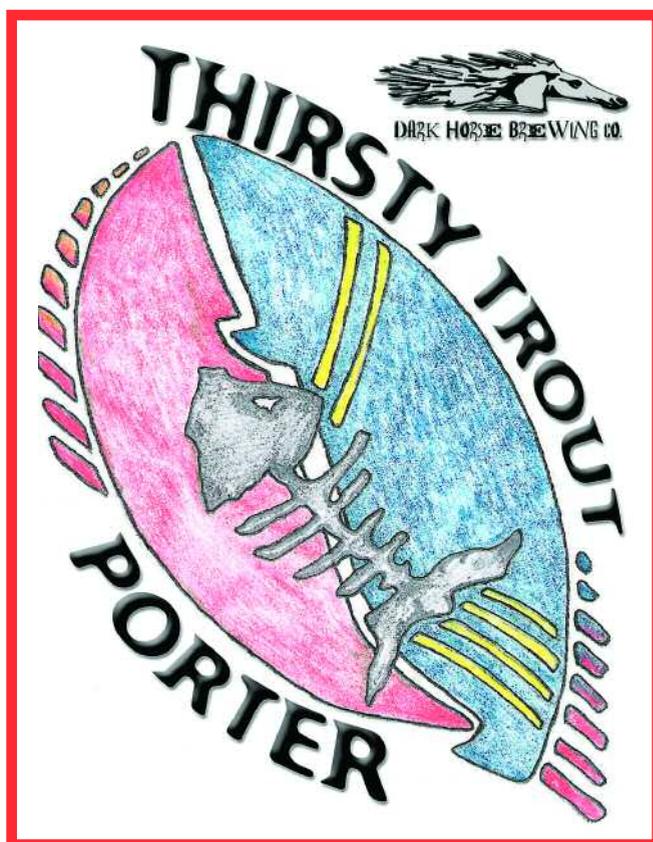
liant idea of making our own beer," he said. "One time we were in the middle of brewing a fresh batch when some students began a protest against alcohol and drugs right outside our hall. Talk about bad timing. A couple of people came in and asked what we were doing. We had to come up with something quick. One of the guys was in culinary arts and said we were making beef consommé. Fortunately, they didn't want to try it. Then again, it was just sugar water at that point, so technically we weren't breaking any rules."

The circle of friends did not let this narrow escape from detection deter them from fine-tuning their craft. As Morse explained, their persistence in perfecting beer recipes almost proved to be their downfall.

"We were brewing in our bathroom and there was a fire drill in the middle of it. We didn't have a chance to clean up because we had to leave right away. I remember all of us standing outside the hall saying, 'We are so busted.' There was beer-making equipment all over the room—burners, pots, bags of corn

“AN IPA IS ON THE BITTER SIDE,” MORSE EXPLAINED. “BACK WHEN SHIPS SAILED TO INDIA, BEER WAS ONE OF THE MAIN CARGO ITEMS. THEY STARTED LOADING UP THE BARRELS WITH HOPS BECAUSE THEY FOUND THE BEER WOULD GET STALE BY THE TIME THE VOYAGE ENDED. HOPS WERE USED AT FIRST AS PRESERVATIVES BEFORE PEOPLE DISCOVERED THEIR VALUE FOR ADDING FLAVOR, AROMA, AND BITTERNESS.”

—AARON MORSE



Aaron Morse

sugar that might have resembled an illegal substance at first glance. It would have looked really bad to someone who didn't know anything about making beer. The (resident adviser) either didn't see it as he was running through the building or, if he did see it, he didn't want to deal with it. We lucked out.”

Morse and his college friend Russ Beattie are still into beer making, but now on a legitimate and professional level. They work together at the Dark Horse microbrewery in Marshall. Morse never anticipated running his own business, but it was in his blood. His parents had owned a bar in his hometown, which they remodeled into a brewpub before closing it down in January 2000. After graduating from NMU and doing an “apprenticeship” with a brew master in Michigan, Morse took the equipment from the pub

and—with his parents' help—opened his current establishment just south of downtown.

“It's a tiny, eclectic place. The bar seats about 50, and there are four or five tables to eat at. We have all kinds of things on the walls, and there's a beer garden in the summer. It's taken a few years to pan out and be prosperous. The brewing industry is very competitive. There are 60 pubs and micros in Michigan alone. For the most part, we try to help each other out. But there's definitely competition. I love it, but there are many challenges, especially in today's economy.”

Dark Horse offers four “flagship” beers year round, including the best-selling Crooked Tree IPA, or India Pale Ale. It has received several honors, including Best of Show at the 2004 World Expo of Beer in Frankenmuth.

“An IPA is on the bitter side,” Morse explained. “Back when ships sailed to India, beer was one of the main cargo items. They started loading up the barrels with hops because they found the beer would get stale by the time the voyage ended. Hops were used at first as preservatives before people discovered their value for adding flavor, aroma, and bitterness.”

With seasonal varieties and other specialties, the Dark Horse brews 15 different beers and produces about 1,300 barrels annually. The brand is available in Michigan and Indiana. In the future, Morse hopes to add vintner to his title. “I know enough about brewing science to apply it to wine making. There are differences, but it's the same premise. I'll have to teach myself again like I did with beer.”

That's what is called a lifelong learner. ■