

## A shot (of local pride) and a beer

A good craft beer, Mike Tripi explains, has to have a story behind it. It's not just some microbrewery's summer ale; to connect with drinkers, the tall one needs a tale.

Tripi's own craft is advertising and design, and his young business, Buffalo Beer Mug Co., is riding the wave of the brewing resurgence in the Queen City with what he calls "blue-collar barware." That means glasses and mugs, accessories like foam "coolies" and stone coasters, and T-shirts, all with some piece of the Buffalo story built in.

Tripi himself is a local product. A Town of Tonawanda native, he studied design at Buffalo State College and stuck around. He took the Buffalo tour of apartments – the Elmwood Village, then Allentown – before settling with wife Erin into an apartment on North Park Avenue. It's from his home office there that he makes his living as a freelance art director, and does the creative and marketing work for Buffalo Beer Mug.

"I've spent the last nine or 10 years executing artwork and design for other people, telling them how they can make their business more successful," he says. "Finally I thought, why don't I just take my own advice and promote a product of my own design?" He looked around and saw a boom in craft brewing – maybe a dozen new beer makers in the past few years, in a city that once had 29 breweries and more than 8,000 taverns. And he saw an opportunity to take some creative liberties in ways his typical corporate clients would never go.

Ergo: a winter-beer glass with the legend Hoppy Heaven Pond Hockey Brew; one called Elevator Alley Oatmeal Stout, with a precise rendering of the iconic waterfront grain elevators; the Growler Cleveland, a tribute to the Buffalo-born two-term president; and the Irv Beer Stein, no doubt a favorite of pistol-packing punks everywhere.

Tripi creates the images and design using Adobe Illustrator; the glassware is manufactured using a printing method called jet direct, creating a raised image on the glass. Buffalo Beer Mug also sells a stainless steel bottle opener, which mounts on the fridge with magnets and holds the castoff bottle caps magnetically as well.

The hard part, Tripi says, is marketing. His products are sold in about 15 stores locally, including the Painted House at 1478 Hertel Ave, as well as Premier, the Hotel Lafayette and two Visit Buffalo Niagara sites. The website ([buffalobeermug.com](http://buffalobeermug.com)) draws Buffalo transplants from around the country.

Beyond that, it's a matter of showing up at brewfests, pursuing partnerships with local bars and breweries, and having fun with it all on Facebook and Twitter. For example, he says, to plug the Father Brewmaker glass, he invited Facebookers to make confessions; for the French Ale Collection, a tribute to the '70s-era Sabres French Connection, he posted a guide on how to speak Frenglish.

One example: Nouveau. Translation: new. Example: "Losing is the nouveau winning."  
An old story for sure.