

Hey, all you Bud Light bigots. How about a Annapolis Pride beer?



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Forward Brewing on Tuesday will release MorphX, a peach sour beer for the start of Pride week in Annapolis. It comes with a butterfly tea power that will make it change colors, and edible glitter for extra sparkle. (Courtesy of Forward Brewing / Annapolis Pride)

Tuesday will go something like this at Forward Brewing in Annapolis.

Owners Claire and Cam Bowdren and their staff will roll out two kegs of a peach sour specially brewed to kick off Pride week in Annapolis, a celebration of the LGBTQ+ community that continues through Saturday's parade and festival.

Then, as each of approximately 250 pints of beer begins to pour, in will go a butterfly tea powder and edible glitter — turning the blond brew all blue and sparkly.

"Oh, we never do stuff like this," Claire said Friday. "I mean the changing colors purely for this year's pride theme. So no, that's not typically the kind of thing we're doing."

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Except that it is. This is the second special release by [Forward Brewing](#) in collaboration with [Annapolis Pride](#), a nonprofit that acts as an advocate and organizer for the parade and the community it celebrates.

This year's brew is named MorphX, dubbed for the morpho jungle butterfly with blue wings and a brown underside. As it flies, the flapping wings create the illusion of changing, sparkling color. X was added to signify gender neutrality in a salute to trans people.



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"They're so wonderful to work with," Pride board member Anne Gotimer said.

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This is a story about beer, to be sure. Forward is small intentionally, and while you can get its flagship beers at a few taps around Annapolis, the Bowdrens and their brewmaster, Warren Hendrickson, aren't focused on distribution. They want people to come to their Fourth Street taphouse and beer garden to sample their experiments, the stuff that sparkles and surprises.

"I think some distribution is great for marketing, but it's not necessarily, you know, our main focus," Claire said.

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"You lose control of the beer once it goes into distribution, and I feel like there's so much more than just the beer," Cam added.

And this is what this story is also about: what beer can mean to the people who make it, and the people who drink it.

On April 1, Bud Light found that out the hard way.

It sponsored a lighthearted Instagram post by Dylan Mulvaney, a trans woman, that launched bigots into fury across the internet. The worst of them might have been a washed-up country rocker named Kid Rock, who posted a video of himself using an assault-style weapon to shoot up stacks of Bud Light. "F--- Bud Light and F--- Anheuser-Busch," he groused while flipping the bird at the camera.

It set off a firestorm of anti-trans backlash and calls for a boycott. Anheuser-Busch InBev, the international conglomerate that makes Bud Light, offered a tepid defense in response and has managed to make both sides angry. It fed into support for anti-trans laws being passed in several states, and prompted other companies, such as Target, to remove LGBTQ+ decorations or products out of fear for the safety of their employees.

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When Forward Brewing hosts Annapolis Pride from 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, the owners don't expect anyone to break their windows or shoot up their beer. They see their work as something to talk over, not fight about.

"I think a lot of beers we make in collaboration with different groups, the goal is inclusion," Cam said. "Beer is a great vehicle for inclusion just because it allows for discussion."

And the bigotry on display elsewhere, Claire said, hasn't happened here. Maryland lawmakers just passed legislation protecting medical care for transgender people, and Annapolis under Mayor Gavin Buckley has played an active role in encouraging the Annapolis Pride parade and festival.



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"I mean, we're sitting at what we call community tables," she said. "So we'll see groups of people that never met. ... I see lots of people meet here for the first time. That was kind of our original vision, that this place is kind of a community gathering."

The collaboration between the brewery and Annapolis Pride began last year. Forward Brewing opened in 2020, just as state and local governments were limiting seating at restaurants to control the spread of COVID-19.

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Gotimer, a health care professional, and her husband instantly loved the place and began picking up beer and food regularly. They knew the Bowdrens were partnering with other nonprofits, sharing a portion of the profits from the sale of specially brewed beer.

The couple jumped at the chance to work with Pride.

"It's an easy lift for us and it's a fun thing to do," Claire said. "Because why not bring more people in the conversation about what kind of beer would be relevant for this year's Pride theme? Those are all just creative discussions that we're constantly going through for each of our beers."



Last year, the beer was Sole and Soul, a margarita gose. The tart, German-style beer was brewed with lime and salt to echo a margarita. The idea was to connect with the Hispanic community. The brewer made two kegs and then shared 15% of the profits from its sales with Annapolis Pride.

This year, Gotimer suggested a butterfly tea beer. Butterfly tea is derived from butterfly pea flower petals; it basically works as a pH test. When you add an acid it changes color. The Pride festival this year is focused on protecting LGBTQ youths and the trans community.

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"If we could find a way to incorporate something about transitioning, that would be really cool," Gotimer said.

Hendrickson, the brewmaster at Forward, used a new pilot brewing system. It starts with an existing beer recipe — in this case, a guava and strawberry gose — and swaps out the original fruits for peach puree. He then located a source of the butterfly tea powder. Last year's beer actually had edible glitter, and it was such a hit that reordering some for this year was an easy choice.

The result is — well, nobody besides a select few people will know until Tuesday.

"The beer's not out yet. So, yeah, we'll try it on Tuesday," Claire laughed.

If the Annapolis community has been welcoming to the Pride organization and its events, Gotimer and other members of the board are aware that everything is not all beer and skittles.

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Its members lobbied hard last year to block the passage of legislation before the Anne Arundel County Council that would have limited flags displayed at county buildings to those of the United States, Maryland and Anne Arundel County.

That would have prevented the display of the gay pride rainbow flags on personal desks, although the sponsor said that was not his intent.

Now a similar proposal from school board member Corine Frank is before the county Board of Education. In a public hearing last week, and in dozens of pieces of written testimony submitted, an overwhelming number of people opposed the idea — though one person wrote that if schools fly a pride flag they should also fly a “heterosexual flag.”

A small number of supporters who appeared before or wrote the board called the policy a way to focus on the significance of national, state and local government flags. It is supported by a local group affiliated with Moms for Liberty, a national nonprofit that advocates against school curriculums that mention LGBT rights, what they deem “critical race theory,” race issues and discrimination.

Frank said she asked for the proposal after parents and others took concerns to her about disputes over flags, adding that school policy now is inconsistent.

“The genesis of this policy is because of concerns that were brought to me,” she said.

The board is not likely to vote on the proposal for a few months.

Gotimer said the flag debate, and the Bud Light controversy, highlight the value of something like MorphX.

“I see things like food and drink as unifying the community, things we gather around,” she said. “Things that we share and give us this sense of community.”

“We can both open a beer and sit here and talk. ... We might not agree, but we can talk.”

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