

Lake County **RECORD-BEE**

In the spirit

By Dave Faries, dfaries@record-bee.com October 26, 2017



Some of the brands featured during the Blue Wing's Whiskey Celebration, opening on Saturday.

Dave Faries — Lake County Publishing

Sure, Don McLean could write and sing. But he was not the person best suited to lecture us on distilled spirits.

Remember “good old boys were drinking whiskey and rye” from his classic eulogy to early rock? Well, rye is a type of whiskey — as is bourbon and scotch.

Except in Scotland they prefer “whisky.”

Yes, there are geographic preferences to challenge any spell check system. The character also changes from place to place, from the smooth character found in Canadian whisky, the smoky, sea breeze terroir of Scotland's whisky to the rough-hewn spirit of Tennessee whiskey.

All of this will be sorted out during the month-long “Whiskey Celebration” at the Blue Wing in Upper Lake, which begins on Saturday.

“It’s a nice part of our culture,” observed Christine DePasquale, manager at Blue Wing. “And being a saloon, it’s appropriate for us to tell that story.”

Although introduced to the new world by immigrants from Scotland and Ireland — whiskey being a loose enunciation of the Gaelic word for “water of life” — it became part of America’s frontier spirit.

Whiskey sparked a rebellion in the wilds of western Pennsylvania. It played a large part in the moonshine lore of the southern hills. And it was guzzled by the gunslingers of the cowboy era. Yet it also found a place in refined cocktail bars in the gilded age.

Blue Wing’s Whiskey Celebration explores the past and present, as well as the regions and trends. It opens with an appearance by Sherry Monahan and Jane Perkins, known for their book “The Golden Elixir of the West: Whiskey and the Shaping of America.” The two experts will be on hand for a “Whiskey 101” session, as well as a more exploratory course, “Whiskology,” in which guests will create their own cocktails.

As the month progresses, Blue Wing will examine rye, local craft whiskey, regional styles, single malts versus blends and more. The event will also include specialty concoctions — from the cultured Old Fashioned to the less charming Pickleback — and food pairings.

“There are some surprising things that go with whiskey,” DePasquale said.

Perhaps even the Pickleback — a shot followed by a chug of pickle juice, although the Blue Wing manager was referring to “good, classic American food that pairs well with whiskey.”

The schedule includes tasting courses at the restaurant. For example, during the first week of November they will feature local craft whiskeys (Cyrus Noble Bourbon, Low Gap Rye, Spirit Works Straight Wheat and Griffo Blended Whiskey) with a menu of cheddar corn fritters, barbecued ribs and whiskey cake.

Other tasting courses compare wheat and rye, old world and Canadian styles and, finally, Kentucky versus Tennessee — both of which match nicely with country ham and old fashioned biscuits.

There’s a lot to learn. But at least when it’s all over, no one will make the whiskey and rye mistake again.

Whiskey celebration

Blue Wing Restaurant 9520 Main St. Upper Lake

Event reservations: 707-275-2245

Opening Events:

Saturday Whiskey 101: Moonshine to Malts 1 p.m.-2:30 p.m., Whiskology 3 p.m.-4:30 p.m.

Nov. 4 Why Rye? 1 p.m.-2:30 p.m.