

The other Bull City brew

Nov. 24, 2014 @ 02:20 PM

DURHAM —

Durham has become known for its small beer breweries that make use of local and seasonal ingredients. In 2014, Durham also has been placed on the map for that other brew so important to the proper maintenance of daily life and sanity – coffee.

In January, local brewer Counter Culture Coffee teamed up with the Specialty Coffee Association of America and other sponsors to present the first Big Eastern Regional Coffee Competition. The first event was held at the Cotton Room at Golden Belt. This weekend, the second competition was held at the Durham Convention Center.

At the competitions, participants competed in two different competitions. In the barista competition, contestants were judged on espressos, cappuccinos and other drinks. In the brewers' cup competition, contestants all made the same type of coffee, then a personal specialty, and were judged accordingly. The barista competition winners will go to the U.S. Barista Championship in February in Long Beach, California, and winners from that event will go to the 2015 world championship in Seattle, Washington. Brewers cup winners will compete for the world honors in June in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Why is this event important? One can argue the benefits for tourism, local restaurants and Durham's image as a city. All are certainly true. The competitions bring visitors who spend money in restaurants, hotels and other local businesses.

Coffee has long been our unofficial national drink, but in recent decades interest in different varieties and brewing methods has increased as more types of coffee have become available. The National Coffee Association reports that for 2014 specialty coffees were 51 percent of the market share for coffee. It is, pardon the use of an overused word, cool that Durham is one of the places where a major coffee competition is held.

The events also are great fun. The competitions were free and open to the public. For those not so much interested in watching a food competition, there was plenty of free coffee, and free information about coffee. Local, regional and national coffee distributors and roasters had their coffee for sale, with free tasting samples. Vendors also gave out information about where their coffee is grown, and other aspects about the process leading up to a cup of coffee. Visitors can get as particular and scientific as they want, or just enjoy the smells and tastes.

There is a point of civic pride, too. Counter Culture is a Durham-based coffee roaster that also operates training centers in locations on the East Coast, and its coffees are in stores and restaurants. Kudos to them and their partners for bringing this event to Durham. We're already looking forward to 2015.

<http://www.heraldsun.com/news/showcase/x761893841/The-other-Bull-City-brew>