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## **Beer venture taps into turn-of-the-century Georgetown roots**

**By J. Martin McOmber**

*Seattle Times business reporter*

It's been a very long time since anyone actually brewed anything in the historic Seattle Brewing & Malting building, the original fountainhead for countless barrels of Rainier Beer at the turn of the 20th century.

But that unmistakable malty aroma is once again in the air around the hulking Georgetown landmark, courtesy of two young brewers who have brought beer back to its Seattle birthplace.

If all goes well, Georgetown Brewing will be rolling out Manny's Pale Ale to area taverns next month, hoping to break into the increasingly competitive market of regional microbreweries. But even before the first customer has downed a pint, the brewery is creating a buzz in the region's tightknit beer-making community.

"What a cool thing that finally there is another brewing company back in the original Rainier brewery after all these years," said Kevin Fawcett, a writer for Northwest Brewing News.

With a capacity of 3,000 barrels a year, Georgetown Brewing is a drop in the bucket compared with what was once produced in the brewery before Prohibition. At its peak, Seattle Brewing & Malting was the world's sixth-largest brewery and the biggest industrial operation in the city, according to [www.Historylink.org](http://www.Historylink.org), a local-history Web site.

Co-owner Manny Chao would be happy tasting even a little of that success.

"We've left room for expansion," he said. "We are optimistic."

Georgetown Brewing occupies a corner of the brewery's old malting room, where bales of fresh barley once were roasted.

All the original beer-making equipment is long gone — much of the building was used for cold storage in recent years — but the sense of history is palpable.

Georgetown Brewing's arrival in the historic building comes at a time other Northwest beer icons have disappeared or soon will. Miller announced earlier this month that it will close its Tumwater brewery, once home to Olympia beer. And Tully's, a coffee company, has moved into the more well-known Rainier Brewery near Spokane Street, where the big red "R" used to greet drivers on Interstate 5.

Partner Roger Bialous marveled at a picture of the old plant showing shirt-sleeved men building wooden barrels for the beer. Back-breaking work for sure and something like what Bialous and Chao experienced firsthand while renovating their space.

The two did much of the work themselves — with help and advice from friends — running utility lines, painting the floors and walls, and scraping their stainless-steel fermentation tanks through the just-big-enough doors.

They picked up most of the equipment for pennies on the dollar from a bankrupt North Carolina brew pub. A great deal for the two guys who sunk their life savings into their dream and a stark reminder of how hard it is for a new brewery to make it, even in the microbrew-crazy Pacific Northwest.

Chao is hoping to emulate the success of local brewers such as Mac & Jacks, where he got his start in the beer business while the company was still brewing in the owner's garage.

"There is so much competition out there," Chao said. "It is definitely a saturated market. Key for us is to come up with good beer and start a good marketing effort."

Setting up shop in a historic brewery is a brilliant move, but Chao said it was more chance than savvy that brought them to Georgetown. The company almost signed a lease in Ballard to share a former hardware store with a church.

But their real-estate agent called to say he had found a better place.

"It is bigger than we were hoping for and a little more expensive," Chao said. "But when we saw it, it was perfect. Seeing the old brew house and malting room, you can't help but think about what it was like back then."

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