

Etc. Next Life

From Courtroom Battles To Harvesting Hops

Worthington's \$1 million gift to Oregon State University will, in large part, fund an aroma hop breeding program

After 20 years of legal sparring, Roger Worthington took on a new calling

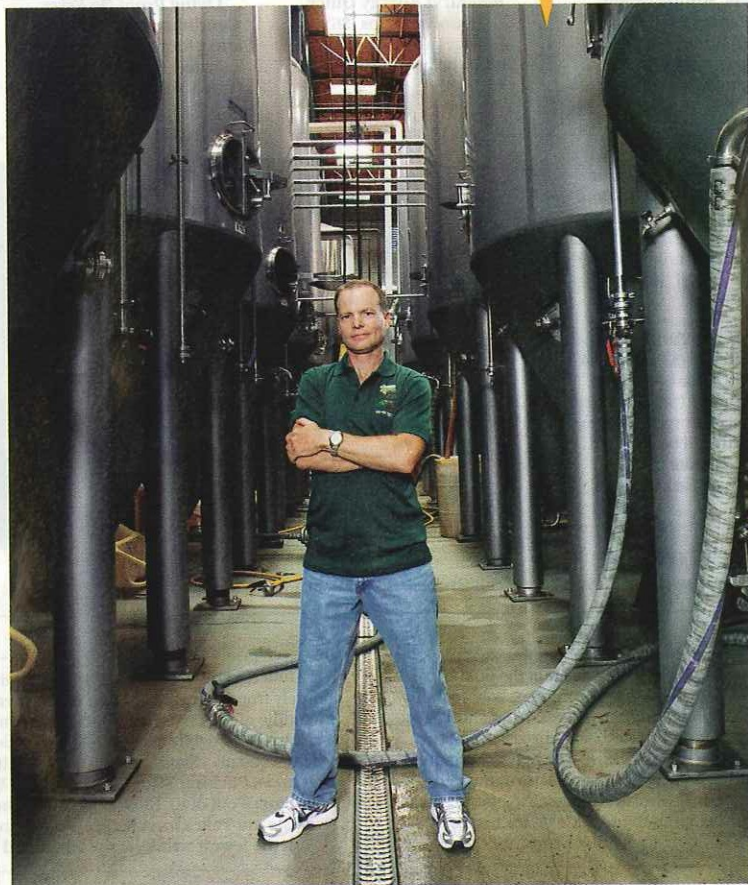
In the courtroom, Roger Worthington was someone you wanted in your corner. A self-confessed alpha male, his intensity was put to good use representing victims of asbestos-related cancer. "I lived that life full-in and full-on for more than 20 years," says Worthington, 49, who won more than \$1 billion for his clients. Asbestos-related cancer "is an insidious disease and highly preventable. It was a calling for me."

Battling corporate lawyers every day took its toll, though: "When you represent people who are dying, the clock's always ticking. There are so many battles to be fought, and I got tired of throwing down."

As he began to rethink his life, the Orange County (Calif.) lawyer returned to Oregon's Willamette Valley, where he grew up. Worthington remembered countless acres of hop fields surrounding his childhood home of Corvallis, but he returned to a different landscape. The fields had shrunk dramatically, and a recent blow came when beverage giant InBev canceled some contracts with local farmers after buying Anheuser-Busch in 2008.

While having a beer together in 2009, Worthington and a boyhood friend, former Nike executive Jim Solberg, hatched a plan to open a hop mill, which would compress aroma hops into pellets. (The hops are added to give beer more flavor and aromatics.) "Beer is something delightful and transcendent," Worthington says. "I wanted to make people happy." The goal: Have their company, Indie Hops, supply the master brewers of Portland, a mecca for craft beer. Worthington shoulders the costs. "I've been hit many times by buddies coaxing me to invest in 'sure winners' only to see deals, and friendships, blow up," he says. This time it was different—even if people warned him that a payoff might take years. "Everyone told us we had a great vision, but to be prepared to spend a lot of money to perhaps make a little."

The \$2 million Indie Hops mill opened in late March; Corvallis' Block 15 Brewery and San Diego's Karl Strauss Brewery have already used its pellets. While Indie Hops has received interest from other breweries, including BridgePort in Oregon, many are still testing its hops. Worthington figures he'll lay out \$4 million before seeing any return. "I believe in this," he says. "That's enough for me." **E** —Chris Taylor



Indie Hops will have 16 to 20 varieties of hops



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THE ECONOMICS OF CRAFT BEER

Cash outlay: \$3.5 million-plus so far, including the \$1 million donation to Oregon State University for hop research

Largest expense: \$2 million to build a hop mill in Hubbard, Ore.

Expected outlay before seeing an income: \$4 million for farm contracts, operations, research and development, marketing, and sales

Indie Hops acres planted in Willamette Valley, 2010: 100

Indie Hops price for its pellets: \$9.75 per pound, on average

Number of hop varieties, worldwide: 100-plus

Growth of craft brewing industry in 2009: 10.3%

Number of craft breweries in the U.S.: 1,558 as of Apr. 30

Barrels of beer sold by craft brewers in 2009: 282,584,685 gallons, equal to 3,014,236,640 12-oz. bottles

Craft brew retail sales, 2009: \$7 billion

DATA: INDIE HOPS, BREWERS ASSN.