

Students thirsty for micro-brewery success



TEAM WORK: The NMMU micro-brewery group are heading to Johannesburg to pit their beers against 14 other universities from around the country. Team members are, from left, Anli Hattingh, Stephen Clarke, Kenneth Oosthuizen, Dale Annear, Ned Camille, Richard Davis and Kaitlin Sprong. Team member William Fewell was out of town when the picture was taken Picture: RIAAN MARAIS

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SOMETHING is brewing in the basement of the NMMU biology building and come next month it could be crowned the best craft beer produced by a South African university.

The NMMU team, including four PhD candidates, will be travelling to Johannesburg on September 10 to pit their five unique craft brews against beers from 14 other micro-breweries at tertiary education institutions.

For the past three years, Stephen Clarke, who is doing his PhD in biochemistry, has been part of the NMMU brewery.

It will be the same next month when he will be leading the team as they take their “royal flush of brews” to the ninth edition of the SA Breweries Intervarsity Beer Brewing Challenge.

“The brewery started out as a biochemistry honours project in 2005,” Clarke, 28, said.

“For a while after that, the

equipment went unused until a group of post-graduate students saw the potential to revive the project. After that, the competition was launched and interest in the project grew.

“Many people have a misperception of the project. This is not an excuse to drink or party.

“We do not sell the beer we brew – it is purely for our own research and for the purpose of this competition.

“We are enthusiastic about beer and the science that goes into brewing.

“This is a chance for microbiologists and biochemists to come together and put their knowledge to use in different ways.”

Last year, the University of Cape Town scooped overall top honours, while NMMU took second place in the lager and third place in the winter warmer categories.

This year they will be entering five categories and taking along a lager (Jack Hauff), a cider (Queen of Hearts), a winter warmer (King Leo), a pilsner (Desert Ace) and a trappist-style beer (Jester of the

Abbey). “We are more confident heading into this year’s competition,” Clarke said.

“We took our time brewing a fine selection of beers, and we have monthly tastings where we get very valuable feedback and ideas on how to improve our brews.”

Other students in the team are biochemistry PhD candidates William Fewell and Anli Hattingh; Dale Annear and Ned Camille, who are doing their masters’ degrees in microbiology and biochemistry respectively, education student Richard Davis, and PhD candidate in microbiology Kaitlin Sprong.

Every team must work with one university staff member, and Kenneth Oosthuizen, 26, a lab technician in the physiology department, fulfills that role.

“The team consists of a very professional group and working with them has been a great experience,” Oosthuizen said.

“You truly get a sense of the science that goes into making these beers, and I am quite excited to see what the judges think of our selection at the competition.”