

LOCAL

Hogtown Brewers like making, drinking beer — and charity

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At Hogtown Brewers, few things rival beer in priority and interest.

Giving to charity is one of them.

The 200-plus-member club of enthusiasts makes an effort to give back to local organizations, and is getting national recognition as a result.

Last month, it edged more than 1,700 clubs nationwide to win the American Homebrewers Association's Radegast Homebrew Club-of-the-Year award.

It rewards philanthropy, diversity, beer education and homebrew promotion.

"That's kind of the Heisman Trophy of homebrew club awards," said President Ron Minkoff, who became involved in 2008.

The club was established in 1985, but community involvement has jumped recently.

In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the club donated more than \$40,000 to charities and nonprofits. Of that, \$29,000 came from the Hogtown Craft Beer Festival.

This year's event was even better, raising more than \$30,000.

It's a lot of money for a relatively small group.

"There's not too many clubs around of hobbyists who are able to generate those kinds of funds," Minkoff said. "Not too shabby from a club of a bunch of hobbyists who are doing some homebrew for the fun of it."

Another big occasion is the annual Hoggetowne Medieval Faire in January. Part of the funds raised at the club's beer booth are set aside for nonprofits.

These two events do most of the heavy fundraising. Still, the club donates year-round.

Every month, a new organization is selected and given \$300.

The club has donated to the Alachua Conservation Trust, Rebuilding Together, Habitat for Humanity, Peaceful Paths and Stop Children's Cancer, to name a few.

And once a year, it gives \$100 to some teachers to ease the burden of buying school supplies out-of-pocket.

“School teachers are always underfunded. We try to help out in that small way,” Minkoff said.

While monetary donations are imperative, members have also logged thousands of hours volunteering.

At the Clear Creek Revival, more than 1,000 pounds of trash was collected from two local creeks.

It’s an example of the positive impact the club has generated.

“That’s one of the cool things about how the Hogtown Brewers have evolved,” Minkoff said. “The last few years it’s really ramped up.”