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Dahlheimer continues distribution dominance Local beer distributor captures Coors "President's Award"

By Bobby Hart
Times Reporter

For Minnesota residents, Memorial Day weekend is a time to hit the links and head for the lakes for the unofficial start of summer.

For Dahlheimer Distributing, a full-service beer distributor that serves many restaurants, bars and liquor stores throughout the Minneapolis suburbs, it also marks the start of the "selling season."

If this summer is anything like the last, the Monticello-based company expects business to be plentiful.

Last year's sunny summer played a significant factor in Dahlheimer's earning Coors Brewing Company's 2006 President's Award. The award, given to distributors that have consistently increased their volume distribution while maintaining a high level of quality, was presented to Dahlheimer at the Coors Brewing Company National Distributor Convention in Houston March 27-29.

"We had such nice weather last summer," said General Manager Luke Dahlheimer, who attended the convention with his father Greg—owner—and brother Nick—sales manager. "Pretty much every weekend, the sun was shining. That really made a big difference for our business. The stars have to align for these things to come together right here."

But, Luke admitted, even the most weather-permitting summer couldn't take away from the hard work put in by the employees. The sales, delivery and storage teams worked in unison to make Dahlheimer one of the fastest growing beer distributors in the state of Minnesota.

"We've got good people on the street that are doing their job," Luke explained. "Whether the sun is shining or it's raining, our job as distributors is to get the beer out to the stores, bars and restaurants, so that people can make a purchase."

While Minnesota has become the second-fastest growing state for Coors sales in the country (Wisconsin is No. 1), Dahlheimer has grown right along with it. Dahlheimer was one of 20 companies nominated out of 530 distributors in the country and one of five companies chosen out of the 21-state central region. Mark VII Distributors, St. Paul, was the only other Minnesota-based company nominated.

"It's a pretty big honor for us," Luke said. "You make a lot of friends with the wholesalers around the country over the years. When people know what it takes to win one of these and they understand what you're doing every day, it's really a nice honor that your peers recognize you with an award like this."

Dahlheimer currently stocks a running tab of 170 different brands and 550



Dahlheimer warehouse manager Phil Zachman uses a forklift to relocate some beer kegs at Dahlheimer Distributing Friday. Zachman has worked for the company for 24 years. (Photo by Bobby Hart)



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different packaging types, called stock keeping units (SKUs). Coors and Corona are Dahlheimer's two best-selling brands.

"Our distributors play a key role in the continued success of Coors Brewing Company—they are the face of Coors and our brands, providing retailers with great programs, service and knowledge of the beer industry," said Linda Gawne, Central Region Vice President for Coors. "Dahlheimer Distributing Company has set the gold standard not only within the Coors organization, but for the industry."

Dahlheimer has won the Excellence Award, for the top Coors distributor in the state three times since 1998, with its latest being last year.

The President's Award is the fourth major award Dahlheimer has received from Coors since the popular beer company introduced its product to Minnesota in 1984. Dahlheimer won a promotional Coors Light Hummer in 2004, which was presented to the company at Ford Field in Detroit for a summer sales incentive.

"We use it for promotions and stuff," Luke said. "Nobody really drives it; it's a little over the top for anybody in our family."

Dahlheimer is a traditional family business that was started by Greg's father, Merle Dahlheimer, in 1959. The business moved from its location in St. Michael to Monticello in 1976 and recently moved from its location on the southwest corner of Co. Rds. 18 and 75 to West Chelsea in February. Construction on the I-94 interchange played a factor in the move, but Greg also said that the company wanted to move into an industrial part of town, rather than trying to stay and keep its identity as a wholesaler in a retail area.

Finishing touches are still being made to the building and employees are still adjusting to the new environment, but for the most part, the company's new location is working out well.

"It's coming together," Greg said. "We're still finishing some outside work and we've got some small details inside that have got to get done, and then it's just getting the routine down. After 30 years at one place you have patterns that you've got to change."

One pattern Dahlheimer doesn't want to change is its ongoing growth in the distribution industry.

With a little help from another sunny summer and a little elbow grease from a determined staff, the local company doesn't expect to.

"The (President's) award may have been won by a company named Dahlheimer Distributing, but it's definitely the people that work here," Luke said.

"It's a people business," Greg added. "If you don't have the right people, you're not going to win anything."