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## Beer yeast company raises production levels at new San Jose facility

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The original 1516 German Reinheitsgebot decreed that beer could only include three ingredients: malted barley, hops and water.

Out of scientific ignorance, they left out the organism that makes fermentation happen: yeast.

"We don't make beer, we make the stuff that makes beer," said GigaYeast Inc. CEO Jim Withee, summing up what his yeast laboratory company does.

On Monday, city officials and local craft beer figures gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at GigaYeast's new North San Jose location. The company's new facility is able to grow enough yeast each month to brew 150,000 gallons of beer, 10 times the capacity of its prior Belmont lab. Withee said they have enough space to eventually accommodate enough bio reactors, vessels where the yeast divides and propagates, to double that output.



COURTESY PHOTO

Bio reactors at GigaYeast's new North San Jose facility. These vessels store yeast as they propagate by dividing themselves.

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GigaYeast provides brewer's yeast to around 300 commercial breweries, mostly in the United States but also internationally, according to Withee.

Local clients include San Carlos' Devil's Canyon, San Francisco's Almanac Brewing Co. and Capitola's Sante Adairuis Rustic Ales. The company has also sold yeast to San Jose's Hermitage Brewing Co. for use in their contract brewing operations where they make non-Hermitage labeled beers.

Withee said he looked for new spaces in Fremont, Newark and on the Peninsula before settling on the 6,000-square-foot location in San Jose.

"In Silicon Valley, it's hard to find small spaces that have the power to accommodate manufacturing," he said.

The lab's operations are highly automated. It currently only has two employees, but Withee said the company is hiring for positions ranging from front office help and sales to microbiologists.

Withee graduated from Stanford with a PhD in yeast genetics in 1997 and worked at the federally funded Saccharomyces Genome Database, where the DNA of brewer's yeast was first sequenced, before moving on to other government work.

In 2011, he founded GigaYeast.

Withee has invested a substantial portion of his own wealth into the company and jokingly contrasted the difficulty of securing loans for his company compared to tech companies.

"To get the capital, we needed to demonstrate profits, not just potential."

**Bryce Druzin**

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