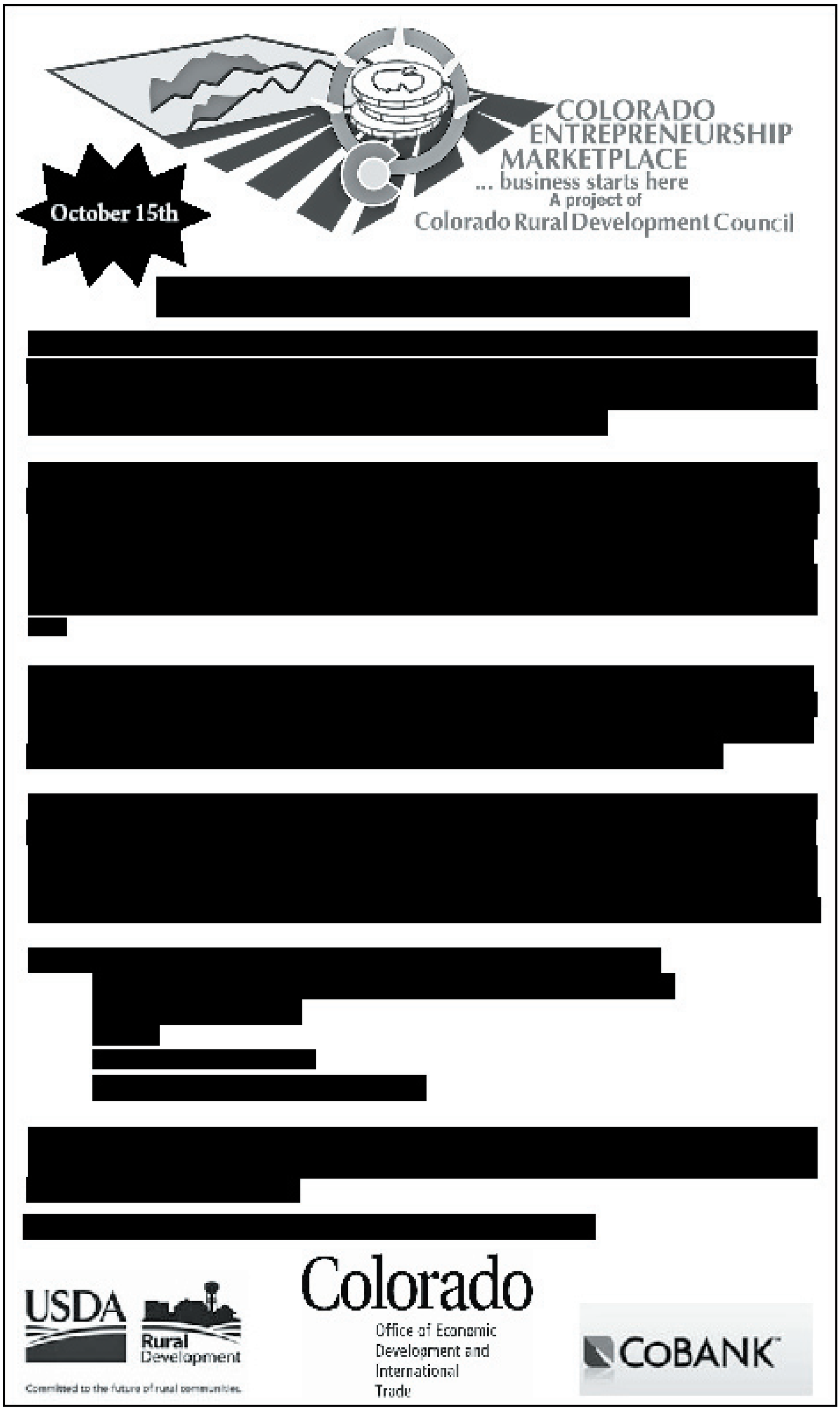
Charles W. Hoffman / Limon Leader

Let the tasting begin! Anxious festival-goers line up to get their one-of-a-kind tasting glass at the 29th annual GABF in Denver. Tasting glasses allow for 1 oz samples of over 2200 beers poured in the tasting hall.



Great American Beer Festival

Charles W. Hoffman - Jssica K. Hoffman / Limon Leader

Once a year in Denver, the country's best brewers, beer fans and vendors from all over come together in celebration of beer.

The Great American Beer Festival, or GABF as it's called, draws craft beer enthusiasts from all over the country. It is in fact, the world's largest commercial beer competition and has set a Guinness book record for the most beers on tap under one roof.

This year, the festival was September 16-18 at the Denver Convention Center. It was the 29th annual GABF with 3,523 individual beers entered into the competition by 462 American breweries.

The judges had their work cut out for them! It took 151 beer judges from 10 countries to judge the entries in 133 beer styles that were broken down into 79 different categories. The judges awarded a gold, silver and bronze medal in each category.

Many people are familiar with only the American Lager-style of beer, and consider everything else to be "Dark Beer" so we will start with that award. In category 29, American-Style Lager or Light Lager there were 53 entries with judges awarding Gold to Miller Lite, Miller Brewing Co., Milwaukee, Wisc Silver to Old Milwaukee, Pabst Brewing Co., Woodridge, Ill and Bronze to Miller Genuine Draft, Miller Brewing Co., Milwaukee, Wisc.

Colorado breweries did very well in the competition. While Colorado's biggest breweries, Coors and Budweiser did not win any medals for their flagship brews, several of their corporate owned breweries did well. Blue Moon Brewing Company, Denver, Colo and their head brewer Dr. David Ryder won the award for Large Brewing Company and Large Brewing Co. Brewer of the Year. A total of 36 beer medals were won by Colorado breweries, once again proving that Colorado has a rich tradition of beer production and excellence.

Along with the competition, the GABF offers an unequaled tasting experience for the beer aficionado. In order to compete, breweries must pour and serve their beer during the four sessions that allow the public in to taste the best beer our country has to offer.

Attendees can sample 2,200 different beers, in 1-ounce tasting portions. This is an excellent opportunity for people to gain experience with unfamiliar styles and maybe find something that they would like to drink other than their standard Bud Lite that they pick up at the grocery store on the way home.

Charlie Papazian, President of the American Homebrewers Association and father of the craft beer movement, said "The most exciting thing is to taste a beer brewed by someone that is in the competition for the first time. Often times, they were homebrewers attending the GABF just a few years ago, and now they are sharing their passion and talent with us. That is really cool."

Papazian quite literally wrote the book on home brewing called the *Complete Joy of Homebrewing* and is the man responsible for the GABF.

Many of the event's brewers are homebrewers turned pro. Don Webb, from Seattle, Wash. is at the competition for the first time this year. Don is one of the owners and head brewer of Naked City Beer and Taphouse in Seattle. Don was a homebrewer for years before he opened the tap house and started brewing on site. Don said "It's a little weird. I've been coming to Denver as a homebrewer for years. Now I'm on the other side of the table pouring beer that I made. It really is a dream come true."

Craft beer is growing every year. The 1982 GABF was held at the Harvest House Hotel in Boulder. There were 22 breweries, 40 beers and 800 attendees. This year over 49,000 people visited the Denver Convention Center. It wasn't long ago that corporate giant beer companies dominated the beer market with very lightly flavored beers with low calories and a never-ending ad campaigns. Now, thanks to the efforts of enthusiasts, beer is gaining a status slowly approaching that of wine.

Rob Fullmer and David Shollmeyer both from the Phoenix area are helping to bring good beer to the desert. "We have a lot of good beer available in Arizona, but it's mostly at brew pubs. There isn't a lot of local beer that is available for people to take home," Shollmeyer said. Rob Fullmer added to that saying "We just want people to have options. Almost all restaurants have a wine list; we'd like to see them all have a craft beer list as well."

David and Rob are also using the power of the Internet to spread the word in the Phoenix area with their web blog www.beerphxation.com where they review and rave about restaurants in the area that are getting on board with the craft beer movement.

During the award ceremony, Charlie Papazian said that he would like "Everyone here to take the energy and enthusiasm of the GABF home with them and spread the word." If there are beers that you like or styles that are not available in your area, ask for them.

With 79 styles of beer now recognized by the Beer Judging Certification Program, there is a beer out there for everyone.

Sam Calagione, the founder and president of Dogfish Head Brewing in Milton, Del. is a pioneer and visionary in the craft beer world. Sam and Dogfish Head trend toward the odd. One of their beers is called *Midas Touch*, and they describe it as "the actual oldest-known fermented beverage in the world! It is an ancient Turkish recipe using the original ingredients from the 2,700 year old drinking vessels discovered in the tomb of King Midas. Somewhere between wine and mead; this smooth, sweet, yet dry ale will please the Chardonnay and beer drinker alike."

When I asked Sam what inspired him to make such off-beat beers he said "I like to look back in history and then remind people of the tradition of beer, you know, how important it has been since the very beginning. I also like to remind them how diverse beer has been in the past. We are trying to bring that back."

Sam has been using his celebrity to promote craft beer for years. He knows that his company depends on the consumer and his ability to make what they want. Sam stood and poured his beer for festival goers through all four sessions. "Where else can I get this close to the people who are buying my beer?" he said. Dogfish Head had one of the longest lines for their beer at the GABF, and people simply love what they are producing!

Whether you like your beer as light as a bottle of water, or you prefer dark beer, hoppy beer, malty beer, sour beer or even fruit beer and anything off the wall, the GABF will surely have a sample for you to try. Next year promises to be even bigger and tickets sell out fast. Check in at www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com for the latest news on the event for next year!