

# Brewing



# for a good cause



*One of the world's oldest breweries, and its only hospital brewery, the **Spital Brewery** in Regensburg, has upgraded its bottling hall to incorporate the latest state of the art. The mid-tier client installed technology made by Krones and Kosme for an output of 7,800 bottles an hour – featuring a premiere: the first-ever combined Variocap closer able to handle crowns and screw-caps on a single machine. The foundation brewery aims to achieve gentle growth on both a local and regional scale, while simultaneously maintaining its consistently high levels of quality. Its biggest asset: the beautiful beer garden on the banks of the Danube, which you can see from the bottling hall.*

**D**ocuments kept behind fireproof doors in the well-managed archive of this ecclesiastical foundation confirm that the world's only hospital brewery still in existence today was founded back in 1226. And it is also the only one able to document brewing continuity reaching back into the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Brewery invoices have survived ever since 1350, and the number of brews, the repairs and other construction work in the brewery, plus its beer output, have all been continuously recorded since that very same year. Even the city of Regensburg's Purity Law (dating back to 1454) is older than Bavaria's, which was enacted in 1516: "The proprietors, the women and their brewmasters shall solemnly swear neither to immerse in nor add to the beers anything whatsoever, be it seeds or roots, be it scrub or any substance of this nature, nor to condone or permit such practices by any other person."

It was back in 1226 that Bishop Conrad IV made available the momentous sum of 7,000 Regensburg pfennigs for building St Catherine's Hospital on the northern banks of the Danube

at the Stone Bridge. The history of hospitals was almost invariably a history of the poor. It was the hospitals that over the course of centuries gave shelter and support to the needy, to pilgrims and travellers, to the handicapped and orphans. Originally planned as a hospital pure and simple for at least 100 patients, St. Catherine's Hospital began to change into what is called a "Pfründnerhaus" (a kind of alms-house) as early as in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Today as an old people's residence, it offers room for 86 elderly and frail persons. Spital Beer is drunk for good cause: the profits made by the Spital Brewery have since its foundation invariably been used solely for financing St. Catherine's Hospital at the Stone Bridge in Regensburg, which means for supporting the community's senior citizens.

***Spital Beer is drunk to support a good cause: the profits made by the Spital Brewery have since its foundation invariably been used solely for financing St. Catherine's Hospital at the Stone Bridge.***





Photo: iStock

*From the beer garden, the guests enjoy a view of the Danube and the Stone Bridge, in the background the Regensburg cathedral's twin spires rise high into the white-and-blue sky.*

*You sit comfortably at your ease in the Spital Gardens – on a hot summer's day in the shade of the chestnut trees or in the warming rays of the spring sun.*





*The Barifill from Kosme, with its 28 filling valves, works with double pre-evacuation and CO<sub>2</sub> pressurisation when filling beers, thus ensuring minimised oxygen pick-up and long-term product stability.*

---

### **Repeated investments**

Over the past 20 years, the brewery has channelled repeated investments into its brand, its equipment and technology. In 1994, the company changed over to the NRW bottle, and in 1999 started to expand its fermentation and storage cellar, by doubling its storage capacities in cylindro-conical indoor tanks. The brewery bought a pre-owned filler from Krones in 2000, which was followed by a small labeller. In November 2002, the Spital Brewery installed a brand-new Lavatec KEK bottle washer, rated at 11,000 bottles an hour. To accommodate this, the bottling hall was expanded to 64 square metres where – in very cramped conditions – three people were working. Beer is bottled and kegged twice a week. While in 1990 beer output still came to less than 7,000 hectolitres, it had risen to 11,000 hectolitres by 2002, an increase of more than 50 per cent.

---

### **Not hunting for hectolitres**

The target envisaged was 15,000 hectolitres of beer output by 2011. And this is precisely where

the brewery is standing today, plus another 3,000 hectolitres of soft drinks. “We’re not hunting for hectolitres”, emphasises Spital Master and the foundation’s Executive Director, Willibald Koller, who is also an MBA and has been in charge of the foundation (and thus of the brewery) for more than five years now. “For us, it was more important to run our production operation to at least cover our costs. That’s why we’ve increased our prices by 25 per cent over the past three years, to what is now 12.99 euros a crate. Good quality at an affordable price, keeping the brewery in the black. Output is self-regulating if quality matches the price level. But our foundation’s core mission statement is and will remain caring for elderly, ill people.”

---

### **Spital Gardens picturesquely located on the banks of the Danube**

Around 60 per cent of the Spital Brewery’s production output is filled into bottles, and the rest in kegs. In addition to kegging, the Spital Brewery offers a special service to private consumers, in particular (as from a minimum quantity of 10 li-

tres), by filling its beer in wooden casks. Another important point of sale, and also an advertising vehicle, is Regensburg's Spring and Autumn Fairs, held for two weeks in each case, where – like at the Oktoberfest in Munich – only the local breweries are allowed to sell their beers. In addition, the brewery runs three restaurants of its own, and supplies fifteen more. The brewery's vehicle fleet, modernised last year and comprising four trucks, looks after distribution. But the most important point of sale is and remains right on the brewery's doorstep: the Spital Gardens, picturesquely located on the banks of the Danube, the heart of the brewery, which belongs to Regensburg just as much as the cathedral and the Stone Bridge. Not only does it radiate a feel-good ambience, it also ensures enthusiastic word-of-mouth recommendations. In the view of many guests, the Spital Gardens are the loveliest beer garden in all of Bavaria. In 1664 and also in 1732, the Mayor and the council of the Stadtamhof district complained about draught beer being sold in the hospital's gardens, in 1748 about the brewery's setting up "tables and benches for drinking". But the then Spital Master countered that the said tables and benches had been standing there under the trees for several centuries, and that they were very popular "among envoys and other upright persons, thanks to the Danube flowing so close by". What's more, he continued, the Mayor of Stadtamhof himself drank Spital beer, to the exclusion of all others. This put a definitive stop to the protests.

***The Smartronic inspector installed first of all checks the washed returnable bottles to see whether they are fit to be refilled.***



***The combined closer from Kosme is able to apply alternately both screw-caps and crowns.***

### **“The location is priceless”**

You sit comfortably at your ease in the Spital Gardens – on a hot summer's day in the shade of the chestnut trees or in the warming rays of the spring sun. On the right, the Danube flows by at its leisure, passing underneath the Stone Bridge, and in the background Regensburg cathedral's twin spires rise high into the white-and-blue sky: the epitome of a downright beautiful beer garden. Handsome Bavarian guys, and waitresses who are resolute but friendly, serve the guests with typical beer garden food: Bavarian snacks, a knuckle of pork with dumplings, or an "Obatz 'da" (a spiced Bavarian cheese spread). And all of these delicacies are, of course, washed down with a draught Spital Hell, for example, either as a pint or a whole litre for a very moderate 6.20 euros. Or with a Spital wheat beer (available in alcoholic and non-alcoholic versions), or else with a Spital Dunkel, a full-bodied, quaffable dark beer with a slightly hoppy note. And anyone preferring soft drinks orders a Spital Kracherl – a lemonade – or a home-made Spital Cola or a Spital Cola-Mix. All of them produced in-house and filled in the bottling hall, which is separated from the beer garden only by a glass wall. Significantly more than 2,000 hectolitres of beer are served in the beer garden each year, almost 15 per cent of the brewery's entire production output. "The location is priceless. It has come to be our trademark", comments Willibald Koller, who was born in Re-



*A reconditioned Robusta labeller dresses the bottles in body, shoulder, back and neck-ring labels as previously.*

gensburg and has quite a direct affiliation with the Spital Gardens: “My grandmother used to be a waitress here.”

### **Empty-bottle inspector instead of visual monitoring**

The machines supplied by Krones in the spring of 2012 marked the end of the Spital Brewery’s bottling-hall-refurbishment project, begun back in 2002. Starting in early April, a new inspector, a filler plus closer, and a labeller were erected. The brewery’s eight bottom- and top-fermented beers, and its five flavoured carbonated soft drinks, are filled in 0.5-litre NRW and/or 0.33-litre long-neck Gourmet bottles. The Smartronic inspector installed first of all checks the washed returnable bottles to see whether they are fit to be refilled. Any non-conforming bottles are dependably rejected. Previously, the Spital Brewery had relied on visual inspection for this. The Smartronic’s rejection rate was relatively high in the first few months, at up to four per cent, depending on the type of bottle involved. To quote Willibald Koller: “We did in fact expect that; it was highly beneficial for the bottle pool. You see, this ultimately improves our beverages’ visual image.”

The Barifill from Kosme, with its 28 filling valves, operates with double pre-evacuation and CO<sub>2</sub> pressurisation when filling beers, thus ensuring minimised oxygen pick-up and long-term product stability. “An enormously important improvement in quality. The oxygen content in the

beer itself, and in the bottle neck, is now significantly lower, which makes the beers taste fresher.”

### **Innovative combined Variocap closer**

The Barifill is directly monobloc-synchronised with the Variocap closer from Kosme, which is a genuine innovation: it is a combined machine able to apply alternately both screw-caps and crowns. This kind of technology is without precedent at Krones. Four of the total of eight closing elements have been designed for handling screw-caps for sealing the soft-drinks bottles, and the other four for applying crowns to the beer bottles. Just one single machine for these two types of closure, that certainly saves some space in the bottling hall – something that was urgently needed at the Spital Brewery. You see, one of the particular challenges that Krones faced in planning the line was the amount of space available: all the machines have now been accommodated on a mere 85 m<sup>2</sup>. Yet the arena layout chosen for the kit and a completely new link-up using the Krones bottle conveyors make for an ultra-efficient, very operator-friendly working environment, requiring just a single person to run the line. The brewery has only eight full-time employees in all.

To make sure its products are perfectly presented at the consumer interface, the Spital Brewery also installed a reconditioned Robusta labeller, which dresses the bottles in body, shoulder, back and neck-ring labels as previously. Willibald Koller had last year ordered a make-over for the

labels, to rejuvenate the brand image. In addition, the Spital Brewery commissioned a small packer, with depalletising and palletising being performed by hand as previously.

---

### **“An enormously important contributor in terms of beer quality and freshness”**

Willibald Koller, the 123<sup>rd</sup> Hospital Master in the almost 800 years of the brewery’s history, had no qualms about saying “Goodbye” to the old line: “It was after all 30 years old (except the washer). What we needed was good, sturdy quality. For us, the new line is an enormously important contributor towards the quality and freshness of our beers at the retailers, and also in terms of their visual appearance, thanks to perfect bottle dress. I didn’t even consider refurbishing the bottling hall with anyone else but Kronen. We’ve always been well looked after by Kronen in the past, they make you feel you’re in good hands.”

---

### **Something rather special: open fermentation**

Over the past few years, the bright beer tanks have been replaced in their entirety, a new kegging line installed, the whole of the storage cellar including refrigeration refurbished, and an outdoor storage area built, so as to have more space. The next investment planned will be replacement of the fermentation cellar. For this, the Spital Brewery will remain loyal to the traditional open fermenters, though these will be fitted with an automatic annular CIP system, so as to ease the staff’s workload. To quote brewer Bernhard Weiherer: “Open fermentation is something rather special, a crucial contributor to the taste of our beers. We lift off the bitter foam that forms but with closed fermentation it all remains in the beer. That makes the whole difference.”

---

### **Brand development and customer bonding**

And there are two more things Willibald Koller wants to invest in: brand development and customer bonding. A “Spital Card“ is intended to combine the brewery’s many different events and provide some extra perks for the buyers: the ticket for the annual dialect festival, for the Advent Market held in the hospital, a favourable offer when the first Maibock is tapped in the Spital Gardens

(when more than 2,000 knuckles of pork were eaten in a single day this year), tickets for theatre performances in the restaurant, birthday crates with personalised labels, or an exclusive party kit. There are many ways to upgrade your customer bonding.

“We serve all generations, both genders, we serve students and old-age pensioners, but if the truth be told it is in fact our senior citizens who are our customer mainstay. Though this doesn’t mean we’re unattractive for young people. We have quite a number of Facebook fans and are, of course, also represented at the university. A large proportion of the participants in our competition entitled “A year’s supply of free beer” entered it through our website. So you see, the new media are important for us as well. And – mind you – you’ll see plenty of young people in the beer garden.”

The line was filling for the first time on German Beer Day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012. After just two and a half short weeks of modification work. And right on time for the open-air season in what is rated as Bavaria’s loveliest beer garden.

*Roland Ruckriegel*

*Kronen AG*

*Tel. +49 9401 70-4012*



***“We’re not hunting for hectolitres”, emphasises Willibald Koller, the Spital Master and the foundation’s Executive Director. “Output is self-regulating if quality matches the price level.”***

