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A brew drinker's dream job

C.V. man among finalists for chief beer officer

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Beer buff Chris Nelson is convinced he has what it takes to become chief beer officer.

He has visited more than 300 breweries in the United States and Europe. He's sampled hundreds, if not thousands, of ales. He owns a colorful collection of coasters from beer establishments as close to home as Seaside and as far as Strasbourg. Topping off his qualifications, he's owned by two assertive dachshunds named Porter and Stout.

Nelson, a 41-year-old self-described house-husband, could be tapped to become an international hotel chain's first chief beer officer -- perhaps the world's first ever -- after defeating nearly 7,000 applicants worldwide.

The creator of TheBeerGeek.com, Nelson is one of four finalists for a part-time consulting job to nurture Best Brew, a program of the Four Points by Sheraton to offer good local and international suds.

"It's not too far from what I do now," Nelson said at his home in Carmel Valley. "I go places to sample new beer, have beer tastings with my friends. It'd be exciting to do in a larger scale."

Nelson's love for all-things-brewed developed in the early '90s, when his wife took a job as a waitress in a brew pub in Oakland, where they lived. On the many afternoons he was keeping company with his wife, Merideth Canham-Nelson, he got to sample many good beers.

With Merideth equally eager to learn about beer, the couple began taking weekend trips to nearby breweries.

"As a waitress, I wanted to be able to tell people I knew my beers," she said. "I wanted to go to the places (that made) what I was serving."

Local excursions became international forays. As his slogan on TheBeerGeek.com reads, "beer travel is seeing the world one pint at a time." Today, Merideth will visit her 300th brewery, a milestone that Chris achieved in December in Mannheim, Germany.

For Nelson, there isn't a bad beer -- unless it's spoiled. And spoiling beer can be easily accomplished if the brewing process is not cleanly done, he said. There have been only a few times that he's had that kind of experience.

"People tried to tell us it was a different brewing process, but I think it was spoiled," he said.

Other than that, it's a matter of taste, he said. His highly trained palate prefers India Pale Ale -- which a lot of people don't like because of its bitterness -- followed by stout and porter (the brews, not the dogs). And his favorite IPA comes from The Bear Republic in Healdsburg.

Nelson learned of the CBO job from a brother-in-law, who thought his lifestyle alone was the perfect qualification. Only 15 out of more than 7,000 applicants made the first cut, and Nelson was one of four asked to interview and make a video.

Also vying for the post are Brad Ruppert, the Huntington Beach chief executive officer of Kegmaster.com, who's sampled 2,800 varieties of beer; Jennifer Talley of Park City, Utah, creator of the Utah Brewers Cooperative flagship beer "full suspension pale ale" and brewmaster at Squatters Pub Brewery; and Scott Kerkmans of Phoenix, a certified beer judge by the Alaskan Brewing Co.

Nelson will have a job interview Wednesday in New York, but judges say they will rely on the public's vote for their favorite brewmaster at www.fourpoints.com/cbo.

Of all the qualifications that Nelson has, there's one that's obviously missing: he lacks the gut -- even if he disagrees.

"I'm in a constant quest not to have one," he said. "I can't drink every night of the week."

Cast your ballot To vote for Nelson or anyone else for chief beer officer for Four Points Sheraton, go to www.fourpoints.com/cbo.

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