

# Backyard brewing is becoming big business

CATHERINE BURRELL

The cockney slang for beer and boutique brewing may well become synonymous when the Southern Highlands' first boutique brewery, Pig's Ear, releases its first 500 cases of Pale Ale next month.

When Joe Duncan, former Joadja winemaker and current vineyard manager at the Marist Brother's vineyard in Mittagong, started to dabble in home brewing, he had no idea he would be making Southern Highlands history by becoming the first boutique brewer in the region.

"It started out when a couple of mates and I won a prize in the Nescafe Big Break competition last year," said Mr Duncan, who studied winemaking at Charles Sturt University and moved to the Southern Highlands in 1999.

It actually started a little before that when Mr Duncan, along with Phil Smith and Gavin Fischer, who all went to school together at St Patrick's Marist College in Dundas, decided to start doing a bit of home brewing.

"We stared off doing a home brew, and we came across a really good recipe, which is when we decided to enter the Big Break competition," he said.

While they did not win first place, they did finish runner-up in the 2004 competition, winning \$5000, which prompted them to get serious about releasing the Pale Ale recipe commercially.

Mr Duncan's association with the

local wine industry came in handy in this regard, and so entered business partner John McGill.

"The reason I teamed up with Joe is because I've been involved in the wine industry in the Southern Highlands for quite some time," Mr McGill said.

"We got to talking about things one day and he told me about his beer.

"I started to do a bit of research and, because the Southern Highlands had no brewing industry, I decided to become a 50:50 partner.

"I'm very excited about it; we had two cases of it at (the Southern Highlands Regional Wine Show awards) dinner last week, and we got a good response."

Having generated a lot of interest, Pig's Ear Pale Ale will be released in the Highlands and a couple of Sydney venues in Balmain and the northern beaches in November, Mr Duncan said.

While exciting, at 24 years of age Mr Duncan said the impending launch of the Pig's Ear brand was "pretty nerve-wracking at the same time".

As three young 20-somethings, Mr Duncan said he, Mr White and Mr Fischer, had all invested their own money in the project, which they hope will become a success.

"And John's been really good, he's just been really keen," Mr Duncan said.

"We're trying to create a quality brand that's known as fresh and flavoursome."



John McGill and Joe Duncan at the Southern Highlands Wine Show Awards dinner at Centennial Vineyards last week.