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### FOR THE LOVE OF SUDS



It was Rob Sama's love of beer that led him down the path of brand revival. A couple of years ago, the avid home brewer, software entrepreneur and financial analyst from Boston was chatting with a friend about Baderbrau, one of the first craft brews to make a splash in Chicago in the late 1980s, when Sama was a student at the University of Chicago.

When he decided to put up a web page celebrating the brand, Sama discovered that the trademark was available. He tracked down the original brewer to get the recipe, moved back to the Windy City, rented some space and, in 2013, raised the Czech-style pilsner from the dead.

"I didn't have a plan to ever start a brewery," the owner of Baderbrau Brewing Co. says, "but this beer had mythic status in my mind. It was poised to be the Sierra Nevada of Chicago, and it failed for stupid reasons."

The original iteration, started by a former Chicago policeman, was beloved by beer drinkers when it launched in 1989. It was even called "the best pilsner made in America" by famed beer critic Michael Jackson. But financial mismanagement, including the construction of a brewery several times larger than necessary, doomed the brand. In 1997, it went under.

"It's hard to overstate the effects Baderbrau had on the Chicago craft-beer community," Sama says. "The fact that someone tried to start a brewery in our backyard and make quality beer was an enormous event. He was cheered on like Don Quixote going out to change the world."

But the world Sama is entering now is very different, with thousands of craft breweries dotting the country. Like any of them, he has to lure in younger drinkers, which he does through seasonal offerings such as an Oktoberfest and Lawrensvet Lager. The more nuanced part is getting older drinkers to reconnect with the brand. "Younger people always ask what's new," he says. "The older people are harder to convince."

There are many older drinkers who remember Baderbrau fondly but have since moved on to other styles. Sama hopes to lure them back by showing that the brand still has friends, first by convincing local buys to replace out-of-town taps with Baderbrau offerings. "We went through all this effort to bring it back; we don't want to just be a nostalgia buy," he explains. "We have to get over that perception and be relevant to what people want today."