



Tim Berra, professor emeritus of biology, samples bourbon at Middle West Spirits in Columbus.

OUR EXPERTS

Distilling history

Tim Berra, professor emeritus of biology, poured his knowledge of research into a surprising second act.

TIM BERRA'S PREVIOUS WORK neatly aligns with what one expects from a professor of evolution, ecology and organismal biology — loads of Darwin, a trove of freshwater fish. But what happens when an academic professional applies his intellectual curiosity and research prowess to a personal passion?

“Bourbon, that’s my drink. I never thought I’d write about it. I visited several distilleries,” he says. He eventually made his way to all of them. “That led me to want to know more.”

Over a five-year period, Berra attended the Bourbon Academy with Woodford Reserve master distiller Chris Morris and the more-prestigious-than-its-name-implies

Moonshine University, which instructs distillers, barrel makers and bottle makers, earning certification as an executive bourbon steward. He also read more than 40 books on the subject and authored one of his own. And, because the importance of field research can’t be overstated, he collected 175 bourbons, tasting and making notes along the way.

Berra acknowledges his academic and scientific training and methods helped him find and organize information, even so far afield from his typical subject matter. “Researchers know how to find information. I understand fermentation and the action of malted barley that produce enzymes. Those are all biological processes that I understood. I had a chemical background as well, so I understood distillation. I thought I would tie it all together.”

Contemplating a project outside your own career specialty? Berra advises choosing a topic you find truly interesting before applying academic research skills to track, consume and analyze as much relevant material as possible. “I do recommend it as a diversion of new stimulation for your brain, but you don’t do this overnight. This took me five years. You don’t want to jump into it willy-nilly.” — **BROOKE PRESTON** ✨

QUICK STUDY

A quarterly collection of high points and hurrahs that make us feel great about Buckeye Nation

INVESTING IN EMPLOYEES

The minimum wage for qualifying staff members will be \$15 per hour under an initiative to be implemented across the university and Wexner Medical Center with Ohio State’s annual merit compensation process in 2020. Ohio State estimates that 3,800 staff employees will see their hourly pay rate raised to the new minimum. An additional 1,000 employees already earning \$15 per hour will move to a rate of \$16 per hour, bringing the total number of affected staff to more than 4,800. “This effort is in keeping with a competitive marketplace and — as the state’s fourth-largest employer — the university’s commitment to invest in individuals and families throughout our Buckeye community,” President Michael V. Drake said. “Our greatest strength is our people.”

HONORING A LEGEND

Hall of Fame coach Pete Hanson, who led the men’s volleyball team for 35 seasons, was honored with the retirement of uniform No. 35 during the team’s Alumni Weekend in September. Hanson, who retired in the spring, is the third-most-winning men’s volleyball coach in NCAA history. He led Ohio State to three NCAA championships and was named National Coach of the Year four times. A new Hanson Legacy Fund will support activities of the men’s volleyball program, including travel expenses and the purchase of equipment and supplies. go.osu.edu/Hanson

DRIVING BREAKTHROUGH SOLUTIONS

One of the largest gifts in university history will help launch a new institute to focus on harnessing the body’s immune system to fight cancer at all levels. Pelotonia has pledged \$102,265,000 over the next five years to Ohio State’s Comprehensive Cancer Center — Arthur G. James and Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute. The largest portion of the gift — \$65 million — will directly fund a new Pelotonia Institute for Immuno-Oncology at The James.