

## UNSUNG HERO

### Real Santa

Bill Wilgenbusch plays Santa Claus at holiday parties thrown by Easter Seals, but "he gives like Santa all year long," according to Shelly Jordan, director of individual gifts for the organization. He makes cookies and candy for the Easter Seals staff each holiday season, and helps with projects as they come up. For example, Easter Seals Iowa didn't have a lecturn, and had to rent one each time special presentations were made at Camp Sunnyside. One day, Wilgenbusch dropped a new lecturn off at the office.

"He built one out of oak for us, and it's really beautiful," Jordan said. "He's a real peach of a guy."

*Each week, the Des Moines Business Record and Boesen the Florist salute an individual who is making the metropolitan area a better place to live. The honoree will receive a floral arrangement from Boesen's. If you have a nominee, call Erin Kiley at (515) 288-3336 or e-mail her at erinkiley@bpcdm.com.*

## ON THE WEB

### Keep current

For articles and blogs on media, technology, politics, business, creativity and innovation, visit [www.corante.com](http://www.corante.com). The names of the blogs allude to their topics, but some titles are unclear. It may take some exploration to figure out just which ones you're looking for.

## READ THIS

### A century of Coke

In "The Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company," Constance L. Hays looks at a century of the company's history. The book focuses on two distinct facets of Coke's history: the charismatic leaders of Coca-Cola Co. and the conflict between the company, which simply sold the concentrate, and the bottlers, who actually made and sold the drink. "We don't need another history of the Coca-Cola Company, but this book is something different," according to the Library Journal. "Moving beyond a traditional company history, [Hays] describes the teamwork, love, salesmanship, ambition, and greed of the men who turned Coke into a global power, an internationally prized object of consumer desire, trademark of American capitalism." House Publishing Group, 416 pp., February 2004,

## EXECUTIVE STYLE

Duane Tinney



Mike Feller, left, and Rusty Bishop say tea preparation can be an art form. The two visited a total of 60 teahouses on the East and West coasts to research the business. Their teahouse will offer more than 100 varieties of gourmet teas.

### TEATREND

# Gong Fu Teas brings hot trend to Des Moines

Friends Bishop and Feller plan to open an East Village teahouse

BY ERIN KILEY

The room was empty but for a table with four chairs around it. On the table were three small white tea cups; three small white tea pots not much bigger than the cups; a stack of books on tea and Chinese landscaping; three larger, more decorative teapots and a design schematic for what the room would become — Gong Fu Teas.

As they talked, Rusty Bishop and Mike Feller deftly emptied the tiny pots into the tiny cups, letting the pale sepia-toned liquid drain out. They then, without missing a beat, flipped the pots back over, removing the lids to reveal loose leaf tea. It was pearl jasmine tea, and as it had steeped, the balled-up leaves had unfurled. The men smelled the liquid, then sipped. It had a delicate, yet heady flavor.

Bishop and Feller, former fraternity brothers at Iowa State University, have performed this ritual hundreds of times while planning their new business. In September 2003, Bishop went to China to compete in a seven-day race through the Gobi Desert. A local family traveled with the runners, and each night the family served everyone tea. When Bishop, then vice president of bank marketing for AmerUs Group Co., returned to the United States, he and Feller, then a timber buyer for Pike Lumber Co. in Indiana, met to discuss leaving their jobs and creating a new business together. The topic of tea came up. Both had grown up drinking it, and Bishop's trip to China let him experience the beverage in a new and different way. Feller had recently seen a program about teahouses on the Food Network.

"We didn't even discuss any of the other ideas after that," Feller said.

The pair began researching teahouses, whose popularity had exploded on the coasts. Bishop and Feller spent a week on the East Coast and a week on the West Coast visiting about 60 teahouses total. At each location, they sampled several varieties.

"I'd never had a really good tea until I started researching for this business," Bishop said. "That's why asking people, 'Do you like tea?'

isn't the right question. A better question is 'Have you really tried good-quality tea?'"

Gong Fu Tea's tagline is "rethink your drink." The owners hope recent buzz about the health benefits of tea will entice the people of Greater Des Moines to stop by their teahouse. Once curious customers try the merchandise, Gong Fu's proprietors are confident the flavor will win them over.

Bishop and Feller discussed several possible cities before choosing Des Moines as their location. In the end, it was the growth and vibrancy of the East Village that led them here. It took them a few months to find a suitable building to buy in the neighborhood. They finally found it at 414 E. Sixth St. Since then, they have been planning, doing research, and working on the space. Bishop and Feller did the demolition themselves, and plan to do most of the framing, cabinetry and painting.

They have a distinct vision for how Gong Fu Teas will look. The floor will feature slate paths through pale, bamboo-look flooring. The walls and cabinetry will be dark wood, and along one wall will be a massive counter, four feet high and 20 feet long. Behind the counter will be a wall of teas, more than 100 varieties in stainless-steel containers tucked into more than 100 little alcoves. Library ladders will slide along the wall, giving access to rare teas in the highest nooks. Small fountains will add to the relaxing atmosphere.

When the shop opens — Bishop and Feller have set a target date of May 1 — customers will be able to buy unbrewed tea in two-, four-, or eight-ounce containers, to go by the cup, or in house by the pot. Two ounce containers of tea are expected to cost \$5 to \$50, depending on the variety, and Bishop and Feller are developing their own blends.

The name of the shop, Gong Fu, refers to a method of tea preparation the shop will employ. The pot and cups are specially cleansed and warmed to prepare them to receive the tea. The words mean something more, however.

"Gong fu means being the master of your art," Feller said. □