

The Bars of
BODEGA
Street

what a long strange trip it's been

*Bodega's gives
patrons friendly,
'older' atmosphere*

By Shelley Mika

Staff writer

The original bricks of the Bodega's Alley building remain exposed — warm, red and worn — giving the business an antique feel.

Bodega's Alley, 1418 O St., isn't very old itself. The business has only been open for about three years — not long for a bar to develop a sense of its own past. Instead, Bodega's is an example of history in the making as it gathers loyal clientele and creates its own traditions.

Bodega's Alley opened in July of 1996 by three owners, Chad Meister, Jeff Fredrick and Sean Darnel.

"We went with what the building had to offer," Darnel said. "An older, restored look is what we were looking for."

To achieve an "older atmosphere," Darnel and his partners kept the exposed bricks and put in wooden floors. To complete the structural antiquity of the bar, they hung antiques on the walls amongst the advertisements for upscale beers such as Guinness and Newcastle.

Ben Dietrich, a Bodega's patron and 1998 University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate, said the emphasis on a restored look is one of the things that makes Bodega's different from other bars.

"It's a lodge style atmosphere because of the wood furnishings and dim lights," Dietrich said. "It gives an earthy sense that's unlike other bars."

"Originally we were different (from other bars in the area)," Darnel said. "We had the older rustic, antique look; a lot of the bars at the time were

more modern."

But rather than using the atmosphere as a theme or gimmick, Darnel said, the real aim was to provide a cozy ambiance.

"We wanted everybody to feel comfortable," Darnel said. "A real mellow, diverse atmosphere is really what we were looking for."

Previous businesses in the space probably didn't utilize the atmosphere as well as Bodega's does now.

The space Bodega's occupies has housed a number of businesses in its long history.

Don Dibbern, the owner of the building, said the last business in the space was another bar called Mudslide Slim's.

But the business didn't last for long, a commonality between others which have occupied the area.

"Before (Mudslide Slim's) there were some nondescript things in there," Dibbern said. "None of (the businesses) lasted long. I think there was a record store and some sort of hobby shop. I think there was even a candy store in there."

In spite of the many business attempts, one business in the space did succeed.

"For about 25 or 30 years, there was a business called Allied Electric that had an electrician and sold lighting fixtures," Dibbern said. "Before that, I have no idea what was there."

Dietrich and Rick Adkins, another patron, said Bodega's has succeeded in attracting a diverse group of people.

"There's a unique blend of people

between the hippies, sorority and fraternity people, people that don't go to school," Adkins said. "You get a well-rounded mix of people that come into the bar. They're real people that aren't cliquish."

Dietrich agreed the clientele is diverse, but said it is also united by a liberal disposition.

"The people are open-minded, free-spirited and laid back," Dietrich said. "We're all people interested in having a good time."

A community spirit is also found in the traditions which have evolved at Bodega's. During happy hour, "The Simpsons" and "Friends" regularly can be watched on the bar's three televisions. Later, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" comes on, and everyone plays.

Bodega's also plays 89.3 KZUM's "Grateful Dead Hour" on Wednesday nights at 10:00.

"When it first opened, hippies started to gather here every Wednesday," Adkins said. "Now a lot of people come to hear the show."

Adkins said the communal atmosphere isn't just among the regulars.

"That's the point of this bar," Adkins said. "You can come in, meet a stranger, and the next thing you know you're sitting down and having a drink with them."

Darnel said the staff attracts people to the bar as well.

"The employees treat people good, and it brings them back," Darnel said. "The employees are what make it great."

The employees' fair treatment of

all patrons also provides a comfortable atmosphere where a diverse group of people can gather.

"We're not a place where someone comes in and takes over with their particular crowd," Adkins said. "The best way we've done that is the employees treating everyone the same."

Adkins agreed the bartenders contribute to a welcoming environment.

"The bartending staff is a friendly staff that always welcomes you when you come in the door," Adkins said.

Bodega's may not be as old as other bars in the area. But with its all-embracing atmosphere and loyal clientele, its attraction to a wide range of people allows for continued success and, in turn, a good chance for creating a long history.



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