

Through^{the} Looking Glass

*Sandy's history laden with relocations,
bar sustains popularity with singular style*

Editor's note: Today is the seventh in a series of 12 stories exploring the history of the O Street bars. The strip – which begins at 14th and O streets and runs down to Ninth and O streets – has served as a major gathering place for University of Nebraska-Lincoln students for the past 70 years.

By Sarah Baker

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The oblong panes of windows flank sets of tall, shiny tables. During the day, the light reflects through the panes which serve as the entire west and most of the north wall of the downtown tavern.

But it is during the night, under the glow of numerous television sets and the softer, warm red glow of beer signs, that people look curiously through the windows at the passers-by.

The view outside is just one of the things that Sandy's, 1401 O St., uses to separate itself from the rest of the O Street bars.

The summer months bring a view of the warm night sky juxtaposed with the busy intersection at 14th and O streets.

The winter nights bring a different view, as the glass fogs over with the steam of warm bodies contrasting the cold air, and alcohol-induced pictures drawn with wet fingers decorate the panes, turning them into art.

It creates an atmosphere like no other.

Sandy's hasn't always had its advantageous location or its uncommon walls of large windows.

Mike Tucker, who has been the manager of Sandy's for the past 10 years, said the bar, which has been a downtown Lincoln staple since 1972, has made its way through three different locations in its 28-year history.

At its conception, it was located near 14th and O streets, where the University Square parking garage now stands.

When the parking garage was built, Tucker said the bar decided to search for a new location. It found one near 11th between O and P streets.

Sandy's moved to its current location, at 1401 O St., in November 1997 for one simple reason.

"It was the only location open," Tucker said.

He also said the building offered an even better location and facility.

Tucker said although the clientele of Sandy's – about 60 percent college students, by his estimation – has never changed, the atmosphere had changed with each move.

"It used to be a hole in the wall," he said of the bar's first location. "It was quite a dive."

But, he said, although the bar has been on the move, its base always has remained in the heart of downtown Lincoln.

"It has always been a college hangout," he said. "Being downtown makes it one."

Tucker said the bar probably won't be moving again.

"This is probably it," he said.

Sandy's newest, and most likely final, location wasn't always a bar, and has a past studded with interesting businesses.

"It used to be Homer's (Records and Tapes)," Tucker said. "Before that, it was a McDonald's, and before that, it was an electric company before (Lincoln Electric System) was around."

The singular tan tile floors from the McDonald's, which closed in 1983, still remain, as does the front door, which holds the same design as any current McDonald's restaurant.

Aside from its architectural aspects, Sandy's has other elements that help to sustain its popularity – namely Elk Creek.

"Elk Creek is definitely the main reason I come here," said Brad Rezny, 21, from Crete, who is a self-proclaimed Sandy's regular. Rezny's companion, 21-year-old Ryan Lantzenhiser, nodded in agreement, as both men relaxed at the bar and took in a basketball game on one of the three big screen TVs scattered throughout Sandy's.

Both men were enjoying the infamous yellow-orange drink on Thursday night.

The cocktail, a mystery mix that tastes somewhere between a glass of Tang and a shot of punchy booze, is the house special.

"I can't give you the recipe," Tucker said, laughing.

The drink was invented sometime in the '70s, Tucker said, and has been a favorite for years.

It sells for \$1 a glass every Thursday night.

"I'd say it's even with beer in popularity," he said.

Other things draw patrons in the door of the bar.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln senior Dan Price said he likes the atmosphere of the bar, even though he doesn't spend the majority of his tavern time hanging out there.

"It's laid back," Price said, as he and a friend sipped beers on Thursday night at a table near the windows. "I like that. I come here every now and then."

Others also cited the atmosphere as being a draw, but for different reasons.

"I come because I know a lot of people here," Rezny said.

"They don't card us any more," said Lantzenhiser, laughing.

Sami Landen, a waitress at Sandy's, said the crowd changes on different nights, but is always a friendly one – no matter what.

"It depends on what night it is, but we get a lot of college kids," she said. "I always make good tips."

Patrons said the bar, although not necessarily out of the ordinary, made for good memories with friendly faces abounding.

"It's just fun to hang out with our friends here, and leave together at the end of the night," Rezny said. "I've come here ever since I turned 21, and I'll keep coming here."

