

MARK SHAFFER takes care of business at Beaufort's newest hangout

Coach: What's new, Norm?

Norm: I need something to hold me over until my second beer.

Coach: How about a first beer?

Norm: That'll work.

☐☐☐ - scene from Cheers



I'm sipping a fresh and tasty Sam Adams Boston Lager the way God and brewer Jim Koch intended – in a specially designed Sam Adams pint glass. According to the fine folks at the Boston Beer Company, this rather flamboyant vessel was designed to improve and enhance the enjoyment of their brews in five specific ways, right down to the hi-tech laser etchings at the bottom of the glass which the company's website claims "create bubbles for constant aroma release."

Wow, it really does taste better. Hey, are the Sox on?

What's more impressive and a bit ironic is that I'm enjoying this fine beverage in the heart of Beaufort Town Center in the space formerly occupied by Brewer's Brew Pub, now cleverly reborn as The Office Sports Bar and Grille. I'm pretty sure Norm Peterson would approve of more than just the flavor-enhanced beer experience. I'm also sure that Norm would never have cottoned to Brewer's. Let's just say it would have been a bit too "green" for the bar flies at Cheers. The beer was good but the atmosphere always felt a bit too sterile.



The new owners have gleefully swept aside any notion of that minimalist approach to bar décor and funkified the joint on an impressive scale. The moment you clear the threshold there is no doubt that this is a place where fun is no stranger. The walls are lined with pennants and memorabilia representing just about every college and pro sports affiliation imaginable. Disembodied jerseys and uniforms float overhead. There's also an equally impressive accumulation of bar junk scattered about to provide the all-important ambience – that certain intangible quality that says to the first time patron, "you are home. Claim your rightful barstool." On a recent night Robbie Knievel dropped by with some friends to catch a game and word has it that a few names on the PGA tour can be spotted on a regular basis, checking out the competition on one of the bar's 20 plasma TV's.

"You never know what'll happen at the Office," says owner Jim Laferriere. The longtime Hilton Head resident and Rhode Island native is boiling peanuts to set out on the bar. This immediately tells me several things: 1) Jim aims to sell a lot of beer, 2) even transplanted New Englanders can appreciate the subtle delicacy of a good boiled goober, and 3) Jim's a hands-on kind of guy.

"I'm the owner, chief cook, I pay the bills, make drinks, you name it," he says. In fact, The Office is a family affair with Jim's wife, Ruth, and daughter, Kalin, both involved in the day-to-day operation of the business. "There's almost always a family member here," Jim tells me.

In the interest of full disclosure I have to admit that I'm not usually a big fan of sports bars. In my experience (particularly in major cities) they tend to be overblown in almost every conceivable way. They're too big, too noisy, too chaotic and almost always way too expensive. During a recent trip to Atlanta we met friends out at a sports bar roughly the size of Turner Field but with fewer bathrooms and spent a relaxing evening screaming across the table at one another. Not so at The Office. "When I first saw the place I knew it would make an unbelievable sports bar," says Jim. Opening a bar in the current economic climate might seem a little, well, nuts. But the opportunity was too good to pass up. The real challenge was to make a place that appealed to more than just the die-hard sports fan and build a base of regulars. That requires more than cold beer and a few nuts. "The food sets us apart," says Jim. "It's not just bar food, it's bar food with a flare. And everything's home made, even the chips and salsa." The menu offers an inspired variety of appetizers, burgers, soups and salads – more than forty items – all at a considerable value. "Everything's six, seven, eight bucks," says Jim. "And nothing will ever be over ten dollars." So what does ten dollars get you at The Office? Each Monday a single portrait of Alexander Hamilton will buy a huge slab of pork ribs, coleslaw and fries. Wash it all down with \$1.50 pints of draft beer.



The Office features a different special/theme each night of the week like \$2 vodka drinks on Tuesdays, \$2 wells and wines on Working Women Wednesday and, of course, Sunday Bloody Sunday means \$2.50 bloody marys. But nothing compares so far with the controlled madness that is Thirsty Thursday when \$2 buys 24 ounces of margarita with which to lube up the pipes for Karaoke from 7 to 11. "We did 15 gallons last Thursday," says Jim. Hold the phone. 15 gallons? "Yep, made most of 'em myself."

Happy hour at The Office is locked in 4-7 pm seven days a week, all year long and the Laferrieres guarantee the coldest beer in town. The taps are seasonal as well as regional with the exception of the ubiquitous and bestselling Bud Light (the beer for people who fear beer). The formerly underutilized outside upper and lower patios will soon be fully functional with the upper deck featuring plazma screens and a cigar-friendly environment for the sports fan who enjoys a good stogie with the game. Which reminds us, The Office is above all things a sports bar.

"The ultimate sports experience," insists Jim. "We are Red Sox Nation, that's for sure." Yankee fans are welcome, too. "It's all good fun," he says. "There's a lot of good-natured ribbing. We love to give each other grief." Almost as an afterthought he adds, "I can't wait for football season." Neither can I and with it my guess is that a lot of us will be logging more time at The Office.

Etcetera

The Office is family friendly. Kids have a special menu and access to Wii games. Express lunch is guaranteed "in and out in 30 minutes." All major sports packages available for viewing with private space and service available for groups.

2121 Boundary St.
Beaufort Town Center
843.524.GAME (4263)

Get more Life Behind Bars online at www.lcweekly.com. Mark Shaffer's email address is backyardtourist@gmail.com