

Pub-goers sound off on smoking ban effects

by Susan O'Neill, Lynn Meredith

Darrell and James Gibson are cousins, roommates and drinking buddies. James is a smoker; Darrell is not. On a recent Friday night, Darrell and James sat together drinking at the Maple Park Bar & Grill. The smoking ban had been enacted just weeks earlier, at the beginning of 2008.

James lamented the shrinking number of places in which he was able to smoke cigarettes. His roommate Darrell does not let him smoke in the house they share. Since the smoking ban, he can no longer have a cigarette with his drink at the bar.

"I'm not happy about it," he said. "Now, I've even got to smoke outside here. The only place I can smoke is in my car."

Darrell, on the other hand, is happy about the ban.

"It's the best thing since sliced bread," he said.

The law to ban smoking in public places went into effect in Illinois on Jan. 1, designed to protect bartenders, servers and workers in other public places from exposure to smoke as part of their jobs.

Darrell used to complain about the smoke when he went to the bars before the smoking ban, he said. This night, he pointed around the bar.

"Look at this place," he said. "You can see in here."

He explained that after a night of patrons smoking, a cloud used to hang in the air.

Carol Williams, who sat with her husband Ron at the next booth, also is a non-smoker, having quit the habit a year and a half ago. If Williams were still a smoker, she said she does not know how she would feel about the ban.

"I'm glad I quit," she said.

Maple Park resident Mary Williams and her daughter Michelle Hansen sat together in Knuckleheads in Elburn that Friday evening, drinks between them. Williams said they are both trying to quit smoking, so the ban is not a bad thing for them.

"I can understand being upset (about the ban), but you can't get mad at the whole world," she said.

Williams explained that she has allergies and that smoking, or being around smoke, make them worse.

"A lot of people have allergies," she said. "Some people are sick."

So long, smoke

A number of bar patrons, smokers and non-smokers, mentioned how nice it was not to have their hair smell like smoke and to have to throw their clothes in the laundry when they go home from a night out.

Karolyn Zimmer, manager at the Bliss Creek Golf Course restaurant and bar in Sugar Grove, said that the place smells a lot better when she comes to work.

"It's definitely more pleasant. It doesn't smell like an ashtray in here in the morning," Zimmer said.

To eliminate the odor of smoke lingering from before the ban, Blackberry Inn recently underwent a thorough cleaning during a remodeling project, closing for several weeks.

"We got rid of the stench of smoke," bartender Patty Manier said. "It was good timing, with the start of the ban being in January."

Non-smoker and Maple Park resident Dick Biddle joked that he had another reason to enjoy the smoke-free environment at the Maple Park Bar & Grill.

"I think it's good," he said. "Your wife doesn't even know you've been in a tavern."

Ban bothers others

Maple Park Bar & Grill co-owner Chris Robinson is not in favor of the ban. He said that about 60 percent of people who frequent bars smoke.

"The state wants to tax you for cigarettes, but then they want to tell you where to do it," he said. "It's too much control. It's like Big Brother."

Smokers Linda and Herb Clegg, of Yorkville, have a similar view.

Having just stepped out of the Bliss Creek bar for a few minutes to share a cigarette break in their car, they said they often stop by on their way home from work, sometimes staying for dinner. But because of the smoking ban, they are just as likely to go home, Linda said. She added that when they do go to the bar, they do not stay as long.

She thinks the ban will reduce sales tax revenues for towns.

"We have friends who don't go out now," she said. "We get together in their homes."

Linda believes the government overstepped its bounds with the ban. She said that she and Herb have always tried to be respectful of people who don't smoke.

"They went through all the trouble of separating the smoking areas from the non-smoking areas," she said.

"Now nobody can smoke."

Non-smoker David Aimone also said that it is not the government's right to dictate to an individual where he can have a cigarette.

"If it's a health issue, then outlaw it," he said. "This country was founded on personal freedom. It should be the people's choice."

Aimone said that the public could settle the issue by deciding whether or not to frequent a place that allowed smoking.

"It's a personal choice not to come in," he said. "If enough people came in for the bar to pay the bills, the place would stay open. It's basically economics."

Note: Elburn Herald staff writer Martha Quetsch contributed to this article.

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