

THE FAIRFAX Journal

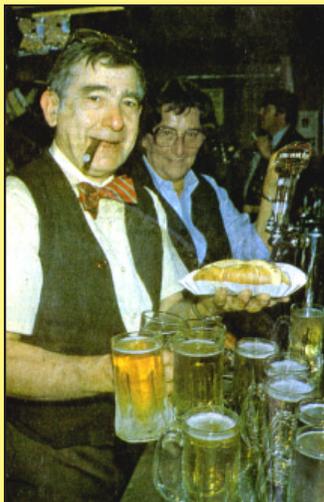
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Vienna Inn Marks 23rd Year With A **SUDSY** Celebration



Mike Abraham and his wife, Mollie, keep the refreshments flowing during Monday night's anniversary party.

By Bill Cormier
Journal Staff Writer

Saunter into the Vienna Inn and mosey up to the beer-drenched bar. Order a cool one and listen to the gab of the regulars who gulp their brews between loud guffaws and the crooning on the jukebox.

But don't believe everything they say.

This has got to be the most fibin' bunch of grownups to ever stalk wild, wonderful Vienna. And their tall tales grow taller by the beer, certainly taller than pub-meister Mike Abraham, a short cigar-smoking dandy who has owned the Inn for 23 years.

Abraham's an institution in himself. And while he'll usually set the record straight on who's spinning yarns, he's too busy celebrating his 23rd anniversary to contain the mad storytellers who down his beers and create the legends that make this beerhouse great.

On the 23rd anniversary, the small Inn is awash in brew at 23 cents a mug. It's an annual event.

Last year Abraham charged 22 cents; next year he'll charge 24 cents, and so on.

The tap runs dry as fast as Abraham can roll out the new keg, and barmaids scramble to deliver liquids to the thirsting mob.

The regulars supercharge their spirits with a combination of beer-soaked chili dogs and suds while they regale the tourists with folklore.

According to the faithful, the Vienna Inn deserves enshrinement in the tavern hall of fame. All this for an unassuming-looking joint on East Maple Avenue—an inn labeled an eyesore by some.

"The Vienna Inn is an antique frame building encased in brick and broken, when cars have crashed into its facade from the parking lot," explained one saloon expert.

He added, "It's kind of a red-neck soul food joint...a working man's bar."

If tourists believe that, they'll be fooled again. Neckties meet T-shirts in this establishment. High-tech computer operators from Tysons Corner come here each day to rub shoulders with garbage collectors, construction workers and cops.

That's the class of this place, said plumber Richard Breeden. "We're white collar, blue collar and dirty collar."

"You see, it doesn't matter whether they wear a T-shirt or a three-piece suit in this place," said John "J.B." Bagby, a balding, moustachioed man in a tan three-piece suit. He works as a Navy contractor for Advanced Technology of Reston.

It's because of Mike Abraham that the place is the way it is,

said Fred Noes, a retired machinist's mate first class in the U.S. Navy. Noes has been coming to the Inn for years, long enough to see his Little League boys grow into men who are now drinking at the bar.

"If you know Mike, you're his friend forever. He's given meals to bums on the street," Noes said.

They say that's part of the reason Abraham was named Vienna's Businessman of the Year in 1980.

One contributing factor might have been that in 1979 the Vienna Inn sold more kegs of beer than any other pub on the East Coast.

Abraham proudly displays his silver keg award alongside dozens of baseball trophies that crowd the shelves of this smoky den.

What makes the Inn so famous, aside from Abraham himself, are the patrons' memories of hijinks and high times gone by.

Richard Saville, sporting a cowboy hat and hollering at most of his buddies, said he comes to the Inn just to get away from it all. He waved a mug at his fellow construction workers and shouted: "I took off from Cooper Material Handling just to be with these guys."

They hoot him down, but he shouts all the louder about how great it is to celebrate this anniversary.

Take Bruce Cockerham, 28. He said he had hardly graduated from elementary school in Vienna before he sneaked down the road to the Inn to see if he could coax a

beer off inattentive barmaids.

Of course it never worked. Abraham won't serve anyone younger than 21 and there are no exceptions.

Or Rod Kincaid, 27, who said he saved the Inn from fire one summer night two years ago.

He spotted sawdust smoldering outside the building and leaped into action. He refused to explain how he extinguished the budding inferno.

The Vienna Inn isn't one of your modern sterile watering holes, and the patrons like it that way. They joke about how grubby the place is—but it's all in jest.

For instance, the new drop ceiling Abraham installed to hide the ugly old one: it's "a crawl space for the rats," laughed Bill Gratz, an agent with Vienna Insurance.

Kincaid tells tourists of a famous fish that once lived in an algae-filled aquarium over the bar. For seven years—maybe longer, no one knows—the fish lived comfortably in the green water, until of Mike cleaned out the tank.

The fish died two days later.

Despite, or maybe because of, the dusty beer can collection, the cramped parking lot and the rowdy songs, the Inn has a devoted following.

Brenda Dissette, a regular who's leaving the Inn to move to Georgia tomorrow, will leave with many memories.

"I'm going to miss this. This is home," she said.



Journal photos by Douglas S. Mills
Mike Abraham rolls out another keg of beer for Monday night's 23rd anniversary celebration at the Vienna Inn.