

## Pit Stop: Some places you just might want to check out!

In old western novels, the hero mounts his trusty steed and rides off into the sunset at the end of the story. Now I'm not the hero, my steed has bald tires and the sunset is where my story begins. But despite a crappy overcast day, a balmy eight degrees above freezing, a visible sun and dry pavement are a welcome development. I felt good as I mounted my motorcycle. So what the sun is setting?

Preacher from "Free Riders Press" had asked me to write a review on biker bars for his paper. Unfortunately, I had failed in my quest last week to review Witt's End in Caledonia, WI. It's a hundred and forty miles round trip. I started out in the rain -



Jennifer and Jimmy

it turned to snow after ten miles. Highway conditions deteriorated. A friend of mine said I was hardcore for trying to ride in weather that bad. I know guys that would have made it. The reports called for rain and snow tonight, so the brief sunshine radiating from the horizon lifted my spirits. Besides it's only forty miles roundtrip.

It was still light as I pulled into the CC's Grove parking lot just as owner Chuck Stroh and his wife Blondie arrived. I reviewed this bar in my first book, "Chicago Biker Bars" and last fall on a day not much warmer than this at the Best Damn Biker Bar contest, CC's Grove showed up with 327 riders to claim the trophy (see Free Riders Press Jan 04).

### So what the hell makes a biker bar?

"It's like a second home, very comfortable, it feels like you know everyone," said Jennifer Grannes of Chicago. "It's cool to hang outside, sip a drink and check out motorcycles." Her boyfriend, Jimmy Petrella, who rides an Electra Glide Classic, said, "the best thing here is Patty, the bartender. She always has your beer already on the bar when you arrive." Patty Marek did seem to operate behind the bar with a remarkable telepathic awareness, dispensing libations with flair and style. "The best thing about this bar is also the worst," said Patty. "That's summer. The place is packed with hundreds of bikes. When you're behind the bar, there's no time to pee, smoke or ride either."

When Chuck and Blondie took over the bar seven years ago, they made a lot of changes, expanded the existing space, added a back bar and a downstairs party room. Blondie has plans for a Tiki room out back. There's a stage for bands inside and out, a huge fire-pit in the beer garden and plenty of motorcycle parking. Blondie and Chuck were married on the stage in the wooded backyard behind the bar and since then have helped other couples with ceremonial arrangements from tents to catering. "This is a great place for biker weddings," said Blondie, who believes bikers have the biggest hearts in the world. "We have so many benefits here from the Hogs for Hope event to Viet Nam veterans." She also said this is a "sanctioned" bar and in biker parlance that means non-territorial as far as clubs are concerned, so everyone is welcome. In fact, Mark Gray, who



Patti and Jennifer



Mark



Frank and Brian

just returned from Daytona Bike Week believes all roads lead to the Grove. "On any given Sunday there'll be a couple hundred bikers, no BS and no discrimination. It's what has kept me coming here for over ten years," he said.

There are horse stables next door north and south of the bar (there are rentals - so if you really want to ride a horse off into the sunset), the riding trails of Buffalo Woods to the west and the Archer Woods Lithuanian Cemetery across the street. CC's Grove is a seemingly isolated sanctuary filled with motorcycles, cool cars and monster pickups. No need to hurry going in or out on Kean Avenue since some of the trail riders are children and horses can get spooked. A nice, leisurely scenic putt is worthy of the serious biker. After all, once you hit Lagrange Road, Archer Avenue or I-55, the throttle is in your heart. Brian Zeitz, a local boy in his mid twenties, said he loves the place and "can do anything I want here and get away with it." Of course, that's if his uncle Frank Fudula doesn't have something to say. While I

was there, Brian had set up his lap-top and we watched educational downloads of Paris Hilton. From what I could see it looked like behind the scenes footage from "A Simple Life." Was Paris choking the chicken? Frank, however, quoted James Cagney in "Mister Roberts" when the Captain discovers his precious palm tree has been tossed overboard. "Who did it? Who did it?"

"You come in here and you get to be yourself," said Khitam Nassar, still bundled up from the ride in on Kyle Halvorson's wide-glide. Of course, she's right. That's what makes any place worth visiting - the ability to leave the outside world outside and step into the swirl of tobacco smoke and biker parley. I went outside, the full moon was already high and in close proximity to Jupiter, a mere 37 light minutes away. The temp had dropped a few degrees. Eased out Kean Avenue, kept it quiet. Once I hit the highway, my heart took over. Hope Preacher likes this little assignment because I plan to do Witt's End in Caledonia, WI for the next issue. Last year for the 100th, some places up in Milwaukee became biker bars for about a week. Witt's End maintains that persona year round.

Story by Kenn Hartmann

[www.chicagobikerbars.com](http://www.chicagobikerbars.com)

CC's Grove Inn  
8258 S. Kean Avenue  
Willow Springs, IL  
708-839-1959



Owners Blondie and Chuck



Kyle and Khitam

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