

# THE NEWS HERALD



## **A honky-tonkin' good time - Burke County Notebook**

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With names like Yum Yum, Golden Glow and Jamboogie, no wonder folks frequented Burke County's 1960s illegal beer joints.

When Burke County voted to allow alcohol sales in November 2017, it did not create a maddening race to open honky-tonks and dive bars from one end of the county to the other, as many opponents of the bill predicted. The referendum passed by a more than 60 percent vote for countywide wine sales, mixed-beverage sales and beer sales. It had been the first vote on the ballot for this since 1949.

National Prohibition of alcohol (1920-33) — the “noble experiment” — was undertaken to reduce crime and corruption, solve social problems, reduce the tax burden created by prisons and poorhouses, and improve health and hygiene in America (Cato Institute, M. Thornton, July 17, 1991).

Prohibition cost the federal government a total of \$11 billion in lost tax revenue, while costing more than \$300 million to enforce, according to information from Ken Burns, PBS.

After local Prohibition in 1947, many illegal establishments were scattered across the back roads of our county, and even with numerous law enforcement raids, still operated at the same location or simply moved to another. In addition to alcohol, many added back rooms for gambling.

I was told a story by one of the carhops working at Pep's Drive In (off U.S. 70) around the mid-1960s. They delivered beer to their drive-up customers.

Every few months or so, the owner would tell the young men to hustle up and carry all the beer from the main restaurant to the skating rink behind it. When one of them asked why, they were told: “I just got a phone tip that the sheriff was coming to check up on us, a raid of sorts. So get it all out of here, now.”

The young men carried it all out the back door. A few minutes later, a couple of law enforcement vehicles arrived with lights flashing. They explained to the owner that there had been complaints and they needed to search the premises. As they looked around, diners at every table had glass bottle Cokes in front of them. The few drivers outside who did not leave before the upcoming

raid all had Cokes on their window trays. I wonder if the officers noticed that all of the bottles of Coke were still full.

Another story was from a couple of WPCC students in the late 1960s who did not want to drive all the way to Hickory to get a beer.

One said that he had a place in Morganton, and they drove to a house and went into the basement. The place was called Lucille's, where beer was 50 cents and liquor shots were one dollar. There were pool tables, dart-boards and a juke box.

Many other establishments dotted the western part of the county. Traveling west of Morganton, you could visit Showboat, Tip Top, Bottom Drop, Yum Yum, Golden Glow, Do Drop In and Oak Park. Closer to Lake James there were Deep Cove, Faulkner's, Lakeside, Pink's Place and Fletch's. Others throughout the county were Jamboogie, Green Fly, Tombstone (just across the McDowell county line), Bear's Den and the 500 Club.

There were many others not listed here. These were owned or operated by folks with names like Fletch, Dixie, Rat, Mouse, Ralph and Bear.

My family ran a convenience store on N.C. 181 from 1982-2012. In that 30-year period, we had more requests for beer than anything else. Of all the hundreds of customers we had to send on down the road to the city limits, I only knew of two who declined to go farther.

One was a woman who exclaimed: "Well, he can just do without. I'm going back to the campground, put my chair in the creek and read my book." The other stormed out and drove north.

In recent years, several wineries and breweries opened in downtown Morganton. Burke County now has three wineries, and downtown has more than a half-dozen breweries. These offer customized local flavors, as well as live music or karaoke for the patrons. Some serve food as well.

If we compare Morganton nightlife today with the illicit establishments of bygone eras, we are fortunate not to worry about raids, knife and gun fights or the resulting arrests.

Today, the atmosphere is lively and sometimes serene, comforting and relaxing, while quite often a chance to make new acquaintances.

Even if you don't imbibe, a night out that includes visits to these businesses is thoroughly enjoyable.