



THOSE HALCYON DAYS IN THE UNIVERSITY PUB

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When did the University ever have a Pub?

It wasn't official, but in the early days of the Meadow Brook Theatre (MBT, 1966–71), the Seaburn Estate (now the location of the City of Auburn Hills headquarters) was used to house John Fernald, the Director, and some of the theatre actors and staff. The Seaburns (contemporaries of Matilda & Alfred Wilson) raised and showed greyhounds. The pet cemetery still remains with headstones for some of the champions. One couple, Lyles and Georgia Phillips, occupied the second floor apartment above the Greyhound kennels. Lyles Phillips was head carpenter for the theatre and his wife, Georgia, was the head seamstress in charge of costumes.

In the early days of MBT, the nearest bar was the Green Parrot at Pontiac and Perry roads. Since the bars in Pontiac and Rochester were not friendly to the integrated theatre company during that time period, the Phillips fixed up the first floor of the kennels into a British style pub. The décor was a little spartan and the furniture was cast-off MBT stage props—or Salvation Army furniture.

University employees, their spouses, and the theatre company could leave their favorite bottle, and the pub provided mix, glasses and ice for a nominal charge to cover expenses whenever you attended. It was a great place to meet the actors and staff after a play to talk about the play, the audience reac-

tions, and the goofs the actors may have made. Actors liked to discuss their on-stage interactions and were always trying new emotional interpretations of their lines. Sometimes they liked to trip up their colleagues with invented lines, or dropped lines.

People would bring food to share, and Georgia would occasionally make her famous strudel, espresso coffee and sometimes her Alice B. Toklas brownies to keep the conversation lively, but laughable.

On one occasion, my Dean, Lazlo J. Hetenyi, who preferred scotch, was invited by two actors, Josh Bryant and Booker T. Bradshaw, to try some of Georgia's home baked brownies rated BEST by the theatre company. The end result was to see the Dean slide from scotch into a brownie binge with no knowledge of their special ingredients which were home grown along the pet cemetery fence. Fortunately, his wife, Mary, designated driver, drove him home safely after an outstanding performance of song and dance for which he had absolutely no recollection.

Unlike some bars in town, there were no fights and patrons usually acted responsibly since they were more interested in talk than drink. A university pub can be a great place where faculty, staff, and administrators from different schools, the College, and departments can meet to talk about campus, State or Federal issues. At MSU-Oakland in the late sixties we had the MBT Pub, but later (1970) we had picket line duties when faculty were involved in OU's and AAUP's first work stoppage. Unlike the University Senate, where a small percentage of faculty meet to discuss and approve new academic programs, the picket line was an informal social occasion where cross-departmental and school or college issues were shared and faculty established new friendships.

The genius of the MBT Pub on the Seaburn Estate was the mixture of theatre staff with University faculty, staff, administrators, and their spouses. The main draw was the actors and staff of the theatre, but the university family had a unique opportunity to socialize and build friendships across schools,

the College and departments. The actors found the mix beneficial and enjoyed getting to know the Oakland University family and their spouses. The actors were invited to various University parties, which gave the actor's wives or husbands a chance to meet new friends.

Would a university pub work as well as the MBT Pub on the Seaburn Estate? Probably not, since it was the informal mix of theatre and university that made the difference. Faculty have often talked about having their own pub, but a suitable location was never found. Also, the University would have liability issues with an on-campus facility serving liquor.

In the 60's and 70's there was a Faculty/Administration/Staff dining room in the Oakland Center that could be used for meals and meetings, but that entailed reserving a room in the OC, having food service catered, or going through the cafeteria and bringing a tray to the meeting room. In the faculty dining room, faculty often sat with their own department or School/College colleagues, and the talk was usually around those issues.

The value of the MBT Pub was its close proximity to campus, its non-exclusive membership (except for students), its unique mix of theatre staff, actors, faculty, administrators, and OU staff and all their spouses, and the Pub's co-op, non-profit nature allowing for reasonable non-alcoholic beverage costs; you could always bring your own.

The negative side of BYO meant that high value whiskey with distinctive bottles like Crown Royal, Chivas Regal, or Johnny Walker Black were often used when their owner was not present. We learned the hard way when we found that our new bottle of good scotch was three quarters gone. We took our scotch bottle home and poured what remained into a Pepsi bottle with our name on it. We filled the scotch bottle with strong tea. We never lost any scotch after that.

The real value of the "un-official" University Pub was that a lot of innovation was discussed and put into action. The whole idea of Freshman Exploratories originated from the Pub, as did the Inner Colleges to meet General Education re-

quirements. New College, chaired by Mel Chernob, and Charter College, chaired by Fred Lessing, had their conceptual origins in the MBT/ University Pub.

Another innovation to increase Black student enrollment on campus was Project 20, initiated by Manual Pierson and Professor Harry Hahn. It offered a special two week summer residence with a reading and writing seminar/workshop in July, 1967. Reflections and discussion on the Detroit rebellion were weaved into the workshop. Jerry Palmer Coon and Jim Clatworthy taught that summer. Most of the students successfully completed their programs at OU, or transferred to other colleges.

Was it just coincidence that all of these innovative programs sprang out of the Pub? Not really. "Skunk works" and "think tank" foundations operate on an open campus basis where people have an opportunity to mix and mingle across disciplines and specialties, and in a University context across the Schools and Colleges.

If Oakland wants to capture those halcyon days of its early years then, it might be wise to once again bring MBT and the University community together in an after-theatre pub environment close to campus—MSUFCU and St. John's Fisher Chapel probably have prohibitions against alcohol. Perhaps a corporate sponsor in the Tech Park might be found. This could bring a new dimension to the mix and guarantee more participation from SBA (School of Business Administration) and SECS (School of Engineering and Computer Science). This might bring the diverse University closer together and allow for a positive outreach to the excellent resources of the Technology Park. Innovation is always a risk, but pulling creative people together can only result in a synergy that will benefit the University and the community.