



Story and Photos by Mark Shaffer

(Editor's note: Portions of the following were first published in May 2009 and August 2014. Thankfully, little has changed . . .)

THE VIEW FROM NOWHERE

For some odd reason you won't find Rosie O'Grady's listed on the sign for Beaufort Town Center on Boundary Street. Perhaps it's an oversight, perhaps not. Whatever the case, as a wise man once said, "unless you know where you're going, you might not get there." And with the construction malfunction going on with the current Boundary Street makeover, things can be a little confusing. All you need to know in order to find Rosie's is head to K-Mart. Rosie's is two doors down and a world away.

Long ago in a misty age known as "The 80s," a visionary reporter named Jim Atkinson set out on a quest to document the great American institution of the Dive Bar, or in Atkinson's terminology, the "bar bar." It was a risky and often thankless task, but Atkinson stuck to it and eventually published a book of his findings in 1987.

The View From Nowhere was generally ignored by a consumer-driven society already being drawn like moths to shiny corporate logos. Time worn neighborhood pubs, taverns, and bars fell out of fashion with a generation obsessed with style over substance. And they got what they deserved. I was once forced into a “happy hour” at one of these Stepford establishments and the experience was soul sucking. Someone at the table ordered a carafe of wine and the server blankly looked out from beyond her crisply pressed uniform and asked, “What color is that?” *Honey, it’s a deep beige shade of apathy and it matches the potato skins.*

Jim Atkinson never took his dive bar tour to South Carolina. Near as I can tell he went



straight from one of my favorite bars in Baltimore’s Fell’s Point to one of my favorite bars in Atlanta. As it turns out, I’ve been to an alarming number of the establishments he chronicled. But I’m convinced that had he carried on over the years he would have eventually stumbled upon Mike and Leslie Pressley’s fine example of his beloved art form.

Mike, or “Mikey” to his regulars, proudly calls Rosie O’s “a five star dive bar.” Step inside and you’ll get it right off the bat. Don’t let the shopping center location fool you. Once you walk through the door you could be anywhere. Rosie’s is the kind of place you stumble upon in Boston’s Back Bay where you’re on a first name basis with the bartender by the second pint and as long as you’re not wearing a Yankees cap everything’s cool. Pass the beer nuts. There’s a classic neighborhood vibe to the place with just the right amount of neon and miscellaneous junk and stuff spread about the place. “Bar crap,” Mike calls it. “A good bar’s got to have a lot of crap.” Velvet Elvis guards the cash register. A mounted sailfish is suspended in an eternal leap above it.

THE BURGER BEAT



It's barely noon on a Friday and a few regulars are getting an early start on the weekend. The lunch crowd begins to drift in. Take out orders – mostly burgers – are already stacking up on the bar. The burgers and everything else that comes out of the kitchen “are made with love,” says Pressley, who makes every choice beef patty by hand. Pressley’s burger philosophy is in line with ours. A great burger should make your knees buckle. “Everybody likes hamburgers and a good hamburger is easy to make,” he says, “but a lot of people screw it up by cooking all the juice out and turning it into a hockey puck. We don’t serve hockey pucks.”

The most popular burger is the Beaufort Burger, basically because it’s a build-your-own proposition. This is your burger, your way. Craving some pig on your patty? Add bacon and the house made Carolina pulled pork or heat things up with grilled jalapeños, chili, onions and your cheese of choice. Mikey likes things spicy, even the cheese. If you need a little extra bang for the buck, throw caution to the wind and top off your burger with a hunk of ghost pepper & cheddar. You won’t find that anywhere else in town. There are virtually no limits to having it your way. If it’s in the house, it’s yours, says Mikey. “We’ll put anything on a burger.” All Rosie’s burgers are char grilled and served with fresh lettuce, a thick cut slice of juicy red tomato on a corn dusted Kaiser roll.

And then there’s the Philly Cheeseburger: a 1/4 pound of beef topped with another 1/4 pound of Philly steak, peppers, onions, pepper jack cheese and house-made yum yum sauce. Mikey’s known for “Da Boss’s Sauces” all made from scratch, including his Creole Honey Mustard and his Orange Wasabi Marmalade. Ask about taking a bottle home.

Our own Everyday Gourmet Debbi Covington's partial to the Rosie O's Chili Cheeseburger



From Hell! It's my favorite, as well. This half-pounder is a Frankenstein's monster of a burger, but in a good way. If you've ever ordered a frozen drink in a mall bar walk away from this beast. And don't even *think* about the hot wings. Seriously, this burger's an exercise in how to build flavor, texture and heat. There's even a how-to chart in the kitchen for beginners. The big beef patty is topped with generous portions of grilled jalapeños, Pepper jack and provolone cheeses, chili, lettuce, tomato and as much of Mikey's homemade habanero sauce as your physician will allow. Big, tough men with tattoos and loud motorcycles have shed tears of joy and pain while eating this thing.

The burger baskets come as God and Jimmy Buffett intended with a dill wedge, a pickled pepper and a mountain of piping hot old-fashioned crinkle-cut fries, crisp and tender without a hint of grease.

Sure, the burgers are fantastic and the hot wings are legendary. But after nearly 30 year spent running high end food & beverage operations what comes out of Mike's kitchen is way beyond your basic pub grub.

"We've got everything from a great rib eye steak to a pickled egg," he says.

ANOTHER ROUND

Coach: How's life treatin' you, Norm?

Norm: Like it caught me in bed with its wife.

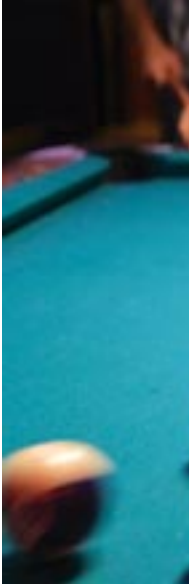
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Like any neighborhood pub worth its beer nuts, Rosie's has a dedicated following, a deeply devoted cadre of happy hour regulars who show up like the mail. In fact, it's easy to imagine Cliff Clavin explaining how beer actually makes you smarter to his pal, Norm Peterson.

“Well ya see, Norm, it's like this. A herd of buffalo can only move as fast as the slowest buffalo. And when the herd is hunted, it is the slowest and weakest ones at the back that are killed first. This natural selection is good for the herd as a whole, because the general speed and health of the whole group keeps improving by the regular killing of the weakest members. In much the same way, the human brain can only operate as fast as the slowest brain cells. Excessive intake of alcohol, as we know, kills brain cells. But naturally, it attacks the slowest and weakest brain cells first. In this way, regular consumption of beer eliminates the weaker brain cells, making the brain a faster and more efficient machine. That's why you always feel smarter after a few beers .”

Ah, bar logic. Rosie O'Grady's is also one of the few spots left in Beaufort where you can shoot a friendly game of pool, and they take their darts pretty seriously, too.

Rosie's also features live entertainment and karaoke. Check the ad in this publication for a



schedule. When the weather's nice, the bar's crowded or just for the hell of it, Rosie's expands out back under the Big Top. Mike's converted an old concessions trailer into a second bar. Oyster roasts go on year round and the bar features daily drink and food specials.

I was talking to a friend in the beverage business recently about the state of the local bar scene. She brought up a neighborhood establishment that recently reopened after an extensive renovation to a chilly reception from locals.

"What's the problem?" I ask.

"Well, for starters they're charging \$6.50 for a Bud Light draft."

Now, to my way of thinking no one should ever have to pay for a Bud Light under any circumstances. But \$6.50 is a crime plain and simple – a loud and clear "screw you" to would-be regulars.

“Yeah, that won’t last long,” she says. “You know, they could learn a thing or two from Mike and Leslie at Rosie’s.”

Rosie O’Grady’s

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Beaufort Town Center next to Kmart
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