

Have a Fat Elvis at Crooked I

By Dan Morey
Contributing writer

May 13, 2010 12:52 AM, Erie Times-News



Never Evers

The space at 1013 State St. has been home to a number of different bars over the years.

I used to go there when it was the State Street Tavern, a raunchy oasis of cheap drinks and offbeat music.

The people who hung out there wouldn't have been caught dead at any other State Street bar, nor would they have been welcome.

I once saw a guy drive his motorcycle into SST and park it next to the bar. A half-hour later, he peeled out the door, leaving a 3-foot track of rubber across the floor. Nobody batted an eyelash -- just your standard Saturday-night scene.

SST was known for booking acts that other bars wouldn't touch. I knew some guys in a punk group that had been banned from every venue in Erie.

Their shows featured shtick like smashing beer bottles over each other's heads and carving obscenities onto their chests with broken glass.

After being ejected from the second biggest dive in town for urinating in a popcorn machine, their backs were against the wall. So, like many a band before them, they went over to SST, where they landed a gig within the week.

After State Street Tavern went under, somebody remodeled the place and tried to turn it into a cigar bar. That didn't fly -- probably because cigar bars went out of style about eight years ago.

Its current incarnation is Crooked I, brainchild of Mercyhurst grad Marty Schwab. The walls are decorated in a graffiti-meets-comic-book style with a healthy dose of pinup girls, and in keeping with SST tradition, the music is distinctly left of the dial.

I went there on a Wednesday night to see a show for a \$3 cover. Matty B. and the Dirty Pickles opened with a set of rollicking rockabilly. Two Toronto bands -- Dead Sexy Sheila and the Never Evers -- followed.

Both groups had a raw, proto-punk garage sound.

After the show, I asked Jay "E.T." Brown, a North East native who plays drums in both bands, how he liked Crooked I.

"It's a great club," he said. "The sound is really good, and a lot of people came out."

Brown ordered a round of beers for his bandmates and grinned as he paid.

"In Toronto, I'd be broke by now. You can get three or four beers here for the price of one up there. We love coming back to Erie."

With Pabst Blue Ribbon pounders for \$1.50, drinking at the Crooked I is cheap, even by Erie standards.

They also serve up an array of theme shots named after rock icons like John Lennon and Sid Vicious.

Elvis has a shot, of course, and though he starred in "Blue Hawaii, this is no Blue Hawaiian." It's called "Fat Elvis," and it contains an artery-clogging combination of 99 Bananas schnapps and peanut butter (yes, peanut butter) in honor of Elvis's favorite snack -- the fried peanut butter and banana sandwich.

The King would be proud, and if he lived in Erie -- which he still might -- he'd probably hang out at Crooked I.