

There are a lot of things people don't seem to know about Hobo's. Free parking. Pool tables. Shanghai tunnels.

No, the place is not for sale, but yes, a new chef has taken over the kitchen. And upholding the establishment's 22-year friendship with Portland's sexual minorities community are Hobo's straight and married proprietors.

Housed within a registered historic brick building in Old Town, Hobo's comfortable dining room includes a small outdoor courtyard. Dinner conversation quietly is underscored by live music from a piano bar in the adjacent lounge. And nearly hidden beyond the more intimate recesses of the lounge is a games room featuring pool tables, dartboards, pinball machines and a soundtrack with its own unique rhythm.

"We get the total spectrum," owner Harriett Guthrie says, "from one customer who brings in his aunt who's 95, to late at night when we have 21-year-olds coming in after work."

Some guests simply flow from the dining room to the lounge. "Others come for the very different, upbeat games room atmosphere, some specifically for the piano bar, and some just for dinner," husband and business associate Andy Guthrie says.

Now, the diverse patrons of Hobo's can enjoy a new diversity in the kitchen's bill of fare, too.

"We just hired a new chef a couple of weeks ago," Harriett announces. "She's very much into fresh foods. She has updated the menu to include more salads, appetizers and things that aren't traditional to our menu."

House specialties of prime rib and deep-fried honey chicken are joined by dishes focusing on fresh ingredients, herbs and lighter fare with the warm summer months in mind, says Kara Pritchett, the young and energetic new head cook.

"I think a chef's personality really makes what goes on," Harriett mentions. "She's very strong. She knows where she's going. She knows her food, and she's had really good experience."

Pritchett describes her approach more as a facelift to the menu rather than an extreme change. She began by updating existing dishes before introducing vegetarian and seafood options.

"My flavors are really clean," she says. "I'm a real purist when it comes to cooking."

In addition, Hobo's is considering introducing some theme nights. "We had a few really fun themed birthday parties," Harriett says, "so we thought we might take it to the next level. Just something maybe a little different."

But the more things change, the more they stay the same—especially when it comes to repeat customers. Beyond the appeal of the new menu, the piano bar and the pool tables, Harriett and Andy attribute Hobo's success to the loyalty of both its customers and its 20-member staff. Low employee turnover has meant familiar

## A SIDE OF LUCK AND A TWIST OF FATE

Hobo's mix of cocktails, crowds and cuisine benefits from its diversity

by Timothy Krause

faces to the clientele, many of whom have been coming long before Harriett stepped behind the bar.

"You can't see people a couple times a week and not become friends with a lot of them," she points out. "I have people who come in four, five, six times a week. A lot of people eat out, and a lot of people I know don't even use their kitchens. So we keep our lounge menu in a price range where people come in and have burgers or whatever more than once a week."

A native of Walla Walla, Wash., Harriett came to Hobo's somewhat out of the blue 12 years ago. She had been a customer at the restaurant for a number of years.

While sitting at the bar one night with her friends, Harriett was asked by the owner if they would like to buy the place. "I don't know what made us think that novices could run a restaurant!" she observes with bemusement.

Harriett didn't even know the place was for sale. She was working at the time in a collection management position for a medical center.

She initially hesitated but doubted her friends would go through with the business venture if she wasn't a partner. So Harriett took the plunge and eventually bought out her friends' shares in the restaurant with no regrets.

"I couldn't go back and sit behind a computer for eight hours anymore," she says. "I love being with people. And what better place than a restaurant or bar?"

For the first five years or so, Harriett bartended a lot. As a longtime customer, she already knew most of the regulars; many continued to patronize Hobo's.

Socializing with friends and customers has been the part of the business she has enjoyed the most. But if bartending came easily, other areas of running an establishment were more challenging.

"I hadn't done this before," Harriett comments. "There were a lot of things that weren't visible on the surface. Insurance things, things the owner wanted—a lot more than just the food. You have to suddenly learn different

aspects of the business. Until you've done it for a while, it can be pretty scary."

Taking over Hobo's was a happy fate for Harriett, and meeting Andy was just as much a lucky coincidence. The two became acquainted, appropriately enough, at a Portland bar in 1992.

Originally from South Africa, Andy had a penchant for travel. He worked in bars and restaurants until he saved enough money to join his friends abroad. After a couple of years in Europe, he set his sights on the United States.

Once here, Andy took advantage of "drive-away" programs, chauffeuring vehicles from one coast to the other and seeing firsthand a lot of what's in between. He traversed the country four times before ending up in the Rose City. Portland and the terrain of the Columbia Gorge reminded him of South Africa, and once he met Harriett, it wasn't long before he decided he was here to stay.

Perhaps one of the greatest changes for Hobo's through the years has been the character of its surrounding neighborhood. Once-common drug dealers, for example, left the area when a police precinct office opened down the street. The new Portland Classical Chinese Garden, residential developments and commercial improvements all have led more people into Old Town.

"With everything that's happening with the Pearl District and the waterfront, there is a lot more diversity of people," Harriett notices. "There are a lot of young people at the waterfront apartments, and there seems to be more mature, maybe even older, people buying those lofts in the Pearl District."

One of the most surprising things to this couple through the years has been how persistent rumors can be—especially one in particular.

"Everybody keeps telling me that Hobo's is for sale. I don't know where that comes from. I hear it probably every month or two. I've never had it for sale and don't intend to, so it's odd," Harriett says incredulously.

"But," she adds with a laugh, "I got some great advice early on from [Stark's owners] Carl and Archie. They said: 'Honey, don't worry about you, they're not talking about you, they're not talking about me, they're talking about you!'"

When digging deeper into Hobo's lore, however, rumors give way to legend. For beneath the modern piano bar

and video games lie remnants of Portland's infamous shanghai tunnels.

The basement is not open to the public, but a glimpse into the shadows reveals dirt floors, stone walls and bars over a bricked-up window. Andy alludes to a mysterious passageway in the wall that continues on through other buildings in the block, while Harriett coyly hints that Hobo's even might be haunted.

"I'm here day and night, and you definitely hear weird noises and things. The building in particular seems to have a lot of history to it," she teases.

Tall tales aside, Harriett emphasizes that the best part of owning Hobo's is having a place where she simply feels comfortable.

"I want my customers to feel the same way," she concludes. "Everybody's welcome here." ■


Hobo's is located at 120 N.W. Third Ave. and can be reached by calling 503-224-3285. The restaurant's new summer menu and other details can be found on its Internet site at [www.hobos.citysearch.com](http://www.hobos.citysearch.com).

TIMOTHY KRAUSE is a writer and editor in Portland who now wants to pen a novel set in the shanghai tunnels. E-mail him at [timkra@millenicom.com](mailto:timkra@millenicom.com).




Thanks to Harriett Guthrie, Hobo's is a place where everybody knows your name

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