

LONELY PLANET: SPRINGFIELD

SEARCHING FOR A PULSE IN THE SECOND CITY

Story & photos by Chuck Adams

Being sent to Springfield to check out its nightlife is like being sent to a war in a foreign country; the unknowns and misconceptions abound. My Eugene peers have only one idea as to what goes down after sunset in downtown Springfield, and it amounts to stripping ... lots and lots of stripping. And one of my friends (who only goes to Springfield for cheap dildos, second-run movies and antiques) promised me I'd get in a bar fight. With all this ominous weight over my head, I boarded the EmX at Eugene Station, the direct route between the two cities, in search of some shade of truth.

I took the EmX because, let's face it, where else in the world is it both so fast and utterly free to be whisked between the downtowns of two mid-size cities? Plus, it drops you off at the spiffy Springfield Station, at the west end of the Main and A Street "strip," which is both good and bad. I heard many warnings to the effect of "Steer clear of Main!" but found that between Pioneer Parkway and 10th Street, Main is an eerily quiet area with shops, theaters, cafés, art galleries and public space — all closed for the evening. As for nightlife, there's **Jim's Landing**, offering a lounge setting for dinner grub and ESPN (a few fellow bus travelers made a beeline for this establishment, only a block from the bus station). Then there's the notorious **Club 420**, which, upon inspection, turned out to be a rather ho-hum tavern — albeit a rather large one. Across the street is its Tex-Mex counterpart **Club Rock**, featuring Latino ballads on the jukebox.

Not finding much of note with these bars, I kept walking east. Five blocks later I hit **The Woodsman**. If you need your greasy hangover fix, get it here. Speaking of grease, across the street is the painfully institutional looking **Club 1444**. (Both Club 420 and 1444 apparently couldn't think of names, so creatively opted to use their addresses.) Yes, it's a strip club and yes, for a joint this seedy looking, there are plenty of Beemers parked out front. About a block away there's the classier striptease **Phil's Clubhouse**, apparently housed in a former Denny's.

At this point there's a long stretch of road to get to the next downtown watering hole, **Spirits**, so wear good shoes if bar-hopping's your thing. Spirits, a relaxed biker bar with pool tables, live music and colorful bras hanging from the ceiling, has an odd sign on the wall that reads "Yes! We serve liquor!" I ordered a rum and Coke to test the sign's truthfulness, and sure enough, they served me up a weak (but somewhat cheap) cocktail. Apparently the assortment of spirits is hidden around a blind corner, above the kitchen sinks, so customers sometimes forget. Lesson #1 at Spirits: Order beer. Lesson #2: Smoking is allowed, and cigarettes are dispensed on site. Lesson #3: Wear the best mishmash of REI brand-Native American-Cowboy-Roadster-wear that you own.

Spirits was happening for a Thursday night. The Johnny Wilde band was rocking out with an assortment of cover songs (everything from The Beatles to T. Rex), and the conversations were turning flirtatious, so around 10:15 pm I made my way back to the Springfield Station (unfortunately, the EmX's last departure is at 10:45 pm). On the way I bumped into a man and woman exiting the **Timber Bowl**. Plainly disgusted by the long wait for a lane, the woman complained to me, "I even slipped 'em a \$50 and still no luck!" I stepped inside, and sure enough, the place was packed, mostly with families. But with harsh lighting and no bar, it wasn't the place for me. When stripping falls short, *bowling* may be the key to Springfield's nightlife. ■

Johnny Wilde
at Spirits



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