

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2011

High Peaks Happy Hour: Stony Creek Inn

BY KIM LADD AND PAM LADD



Our most frequently frequented bar since the start of our drinking careers, something about the Stony Creek Inn just keeps luring us back year after year. As winter surrenders to spring, we count down the days until reopening, marking our calendars to keep the date free of other conflicts, and reminding our friends to save the day. This year's opening party featured Jeff Gonzales warming the gathering crowd with his country-blues, finger-pickin' solo acoustic sets. The Stony Creek Band, an Adirondack music icon, is as grand a feature act as can be found in the Adirondack Park; Sunday's Mexican menu a festive feast befitting the occasion.

Excellent food, always cooked to order at an amazingly low price, world-class musicians, a variety of friendly, happy patrons whose camaraderie and grinning faces are contagious, and a dance floor packed with uninhibited, twirling, foot-stomping glee. The scrumptious smells from the kitchen follow you inside and outside - there is no escape - you will have to eat something while you're here. Drinks are straightforward. No fancy martinis or clever shots. A modest variety of bottled and draft beers, simple mixed drinks and an occasional margarita are the norm, priced a little on the high side. With only two bartenders on a busy night, expect to wait a little while to quench your thirst. Just relax. Listen to the music. Look around. Plying customers with excessive quantities of alcohol is not high on the proprietors' list of goals.

And let's not forget our outstanding hosts, Dot Bartell and John Fickel, owners and curators of this exhibit for over 31 years. Diminutive Dottie can be spotted darting throughout the dining area - meeting, greeting and seating diners. John is in the kitchen but makes frequent appearances, usually wearing a stained apron over shorts, a bandanna covering his head.

A visit with Dottie reveals a strong sense of pride in the history of the Stony Creek Inn. Built in 1905 with locally milled lumber, before electricity made its way



to Stony Creek, the interior has changed little over the years. With characteristic Adirondack thrift and ingenuity, materials are often reused in new and creative ways. A door becomes a window, perhaps; siding serves as ceiling. The hardwood floor is mostly concealed by layers of wax that has blackened over the century; the only area of bare wood is the dance floor, worn too thin by countless shuffling, stomping feet to even sand one more time. A sense of community within the walls of the Stony Creek Inn is reflected in the collection of artwork, posters, photos and memorabilia hanging on the walls. An original poster, now framed and signed by local musicians was given in thanks for "Dot and Johnstock", an annual fundraiser now in its fourth year, with proceeds to benefit **Cindy's Retreat** and the **Southern Adirondack Musicians Fund**.



The local regulars typically occupy the barstools furthest from the action, where they have a wide-angle view of the activity taking place around them. The pool table is always occupied and clusters of people ebb and flow with the tide of more and more bodies. The dining room closest to the stage tends to hold those who are really there to hear the band and to dance. There's a back room behind it, nicknamed the "Yuppie Room", which accommodates up to 35 people who can still see and hear the band and dance floor. One table of folks brought to mind The Fockers at a rehearsal dinner. Yuppies and hippies, young and old, bikers and beatniks,

artists, musicians, professionals (buttoned-down and buttoned-up), intellectuals, locals, and vacationers populate the Inn throughout its season, which currently begins in mid-May and continues through the last Sunday of hunting season, this year falling on December 4. Hunters and outdoor sports enthusiasts often inhabit the upstairs rooms, rented nightly for \$35.00. A step above camping, the accommodations offer no cell phone reception, no TV's or even room keys, but clean sheets and plenty of hot water.

Slipping out to the spacious front porch, recently rebuilt with the help of volunteers, offers a place to escape the din, cool off after bumping bodies on the dance floor, have a conversation, or just hear yourself think. We met a group of gentlemen who, once they inquired about Kim's camera, were eager to share a book called *Nickel City Drafts: a Drinking History of Buffalo, NY*. Odd they should carry it around with them. What the Inn lacks in ambience is compensated in enthusiasm and diversity. It's loud, crowded, and just a whole lot of fun.

There is a common misconception that the Stony Creek Inn is in the middle of nowhere. In reality, the picturesque drive to Stony Creek is just 15 minutes from Warrensburg and the Hadley/Luzerne area, 20 minutes from Lake George, and 30 minutes from Queensbury. People drive a lot further for a lot less. Like the sign says, "The road to a friendly town is never long".

*Kim and Pam Ladd's book, **Happy Hour in the High Peaks**, is currently in the research stage. Together they visit pubs, bars and taverns with the goal of selecting the top 46 bars in the Adirondack Park. They regularly report their findings here at the Almanack and at their own blog.*

