

# Moose lodge too hip to be square

On their way home from the train after working late, a couple of businessmen popped into the Moose Lodge for a quick beer.

They were quickly informed that the Moose, a private fraternal organization that has existed in Downers Grove since 1930, serves only members.

So they joined on the spot, securing the necessary sponsorship from one of the denizens at the bar.

The two are among more than 600 new members who have flocked to the Moose in the last two years, attracted by its convenience, its family-friendly atmosphere and its retro vibe.

Since May 2007, membership in the organization has more than doubled to about 1,000 men. Women can join as Women of the Moose.

"We're lucky to be part of the Downers Grove downtown area, with neighborhoods all around us," says Mike Pelling, the lodge administrator. "A lot of members can walk to us. We're close to the train. And we've added things younger men like to do."

Aside from the free

**Elaine Johnson**

View from Downers Grove



popcorn and occasional \$7 buckets of beer, which are popular among young and old, those activities include a refurbished pool table from the 1950s, PacMan and other vintage video games, and a beanbag league, which has become "the hot bag league in town," Pelling said.

In fact, "hot" is the adjective I've heard applied to the Moose again and again.

"It has become noticeably more hip in the last few years," said one new member. "It's really the 'anti' nightclub — the place to be when you're too cool for the room where everyone is too cool."

It has undoubtedly become the unpretentious place to see and be seen, where younger community leaders, such as Mayor Ron Sandack, can mingle with long-time lodge members without feeling like they're on show.

"The mayor is just another member when he comes in," Pelling said.

The addition of so many younger members has raised the hackles of some old-timers, but Pelling said they might just be the saviors.

"I believe we would have lost the building if not for the infusion of new members," Pelling said. "We weren't making it."

It costs about \$6,000 per month to keep the doors of the 55-year-old building open, he said. "The old members didn't come out at night."

The new members and their families have revitalized the lodge, and the Moose have responded by becoming more family friendly.

The main floor social area now includes a kids room outfitted with a television, Nintendo and video games, and donated toys. There's also a one-way mirror that allows parents to keep track of their kids.

"We're children friendly," Pelling said. "You couldn't believe how many members bring their kids in. No one complains — as long as they don't sit on a bar stool — and parents like that."

The lodge is also community friendly, with a major

See JOHNSON, Page 7

From Page 6

goal of "getting people from charitable organizations to use our hall," Pelling said.

During my son's Cub Scout years, we spent many an hour attending Pinewood Derbys and Blue-and-Gold banquets in the lodge's upstairs hall. In recent weeks, the DG Cares organization hosted a school board candidates' forum in the lower level, and several local schools and churches have events scheduled there this spring.

"We give it away for free," Pelling says of the space, although groups that want to serve liquor have to pay for a \$156 village license. "But we'll donate the bartender," he said.

The lodge also hosts Friday-night fish fries for \$6.50 to \$9 — "Lent is going to be huge" — and special events such as a Super Bowl party with snacks and beer for \$10.

The cost of membership is also modest: \$35 per year with a \$20 initiation fee.

The question remains whether the Moose's new members will continue to bask in the lodge's resolutely retro atmosphere of terrazzo floors, well-worn bar and simple furnishings.

"The Moose could be so much more popular than it is — they just need someone to market it," said one

new member. "You couldn't invent a place as anti-cool and hip as the Moose Lodge."

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a resident of Downers Grove since 1994. Contact her c/o Sun Publications, P.O. Box 4830, Naperville, IL 60567, or at dgcolumnist@comcast.net.

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