

Pub owner has been serving up U.S. History lessons for 24 years

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Photo by James Goller

HAIL TO THE CHIEF... Mike Driscoll of Orchard Park holds the flag of Nunavut, the latest addition to his pub full of historical relics. Flags and presidential portraits dominate the décor, and historical trivia dominates the conversation at the bar.

The Independence Day holiday weekend is sure to be busy for Orchard Park resident Mike Driscoll. The Fourth of July - along with other American holidays - are eventful for the founder, owner and bartender of Founding Fathers Pub in Buffalo.

When Driscoll purchased the former livery on Edward Street in June 1985, the neighborhood was going through a transitional period. Located halfway between Chippewa and Allen, the building used to be home to a bar called Thurston's House of Magic. Prior to that, another bar, called the Livery Stable, sat at the location.

At the time he purchased the building, Driscoll was tending bar at Mother's Restaurant on Virginia Place about three blocks from his current location.

"I whipped this place up a few hours every afternoon before going to work," said Driscoll.

After almost six months of preparation, Driscoll opened his pub on the first Tuesday of November, Election Day.

"When we opened on Election Day, the media people heard about it and they came," Driscoll said. "After that, word spread."

Before his bartending days, Driscoll was a social studies teacher at Saint Gregory the Great in Williamsville, but figured bartending was a smarter career choice financially.

"If I could have landed a good public school job, I probably would have kept with it," he said.

It was while he was teaching that Driscoll began collecting historical souvenirs at gift shops while on field trips to cities such as Boston and Washington, D.C. When his apartment began to overflow with his collectibles, Driscoll decided to use them at his bar.

Many of the relics are presidential, but the pub features several national flags and souvenirs from other countries. Most of the decorations at Founding Fathers are from Driscoll's collection, but several are gifts from patrons. The latest is a flag of the largest and newest Canadian territory, Nunavut.

The Presidential and historical nostalgia at Founding Fathers gives the establishment an incredibly unique atmosphere. Driscoll adds to that by challenging his patrons with trivia and providing a welcoming atmosphere, in which conversation dominates.

Driscoll says he was always a big trivia buff, even before the days of trivial pursuit, and considered trivia as a way to stay connected to education.

"My tie to education wasn't going to be there anymore, so this keeps it going," he said.

Driscoll makes a weekly trip to the library, where he will check out two or three books on various topics. The original intent of his trip was to provide reading material for his three children, but the books sat on the kitchen table. Now Driscoll uses the trip to supplement his already impressive knowledge and to keep his questions fresh.

Trivia isn't the only thing that keeps customers piling in to Driscoll's pub. The establishment also offers free popcorn and nachos. When he first acquired the liquor license, Driscoll didn't have a grill and needed a way for patrons to stay if they were hungry. Eventually, a grill was purchased and a menu was created one item at a time, starting with a steak sandwich. Now the menu features unique eats including a chicken sandwich called Hail to the Chef and the Independence Burger.

Even after almost 24 years behind the bar, Driscoll comes to the work with a smile and a fresh crop of questions for his customers. Prior to his shift, loyal patrons secure stools at the bar for when Driscoll begins asking questions and entertaining them with his charm.

"We always get great customers," said Driscoll. Since he has become a mainstay, it is common for customers to ask him what he will do when he retires, to which Driscoll responds: "I retired when I bought this place."