

4 Thursday is Chicken Night

The Power Company: Tired or Trendy?



The Power Company of Durham. Mention that bar to people and you're likely to get a variety of responses--from flawless to scary.

Recently, a group of UNC students and Chapel Hill residents were asked about their impressions of the night club, which is located in downtown Durham on the loop. Open 9-until Wednesday to Sunday, it is the closest gay bar to the UNC campus. The bar is at press time in the process of remodelling, which brought cheers from those interviewed. The old decor, in Don's eyes, was "nasty and dirty." Several hope the dance floor is improved. One consequence of the renovation was that no one from the bar was available to comment on this article.

Of the people questioned, about half considered themselves frequent goers, at least once every two weeks. Most of the others were at one time frequent goers but felt as if they had "outgrown" the bar scene. Molly said she was tired of the endless pick-ups and come-ons.

Alex felt the gay bar serves a useful purpose for the gay and lesbian community, but that this purpose is exhausted in time. "Many times it is a person's first exposure to the gay lifestyle. Those first coming out tend to go to the bars a lot because it gives them a place to be themselves. People can display their feelings without fear because they know they are not alone. But generally once a person becomes more secure with his/her sexuality, they no longer feel the need to go out to the bar often."

Most people saw the bar as a place to dance and meet friends. Others cited the hope of finding Mr. or Ms. Right as their primary reason for going. But only a few said that they went looking for a one-night stand. As Tom put it, "If sex happens, that's great, but I don't go their looking for a man for the night."

The music played at the Power Company was mentioned often, with most liking the mainstream disco usually played. But many liked the Thursday night set of "alternative music." Says Jamie, "The bar has finally learned that not all college students like disco."

Virtually everyone agreed that the Power Company was not a place to go alone. Greg states, "I never go alone, if for no other reason than to be guaranteed a dance partner." Those who go alone tend to feel isolated because the bar tends to be very cliquish, with a high level of "attitude" on the part of the patrons. Leon says, "The only people you'll find there are pretentious, fake people." But others, like Garrett, had no trouble mingling among the cliques.

One of the more controversial subjects discussed about the Power Company was its racist reputation. Some people say that blacks are not encouraged to go. This is not to say that Blacks are not admitted, but that "the bar caters to the most

lucrative crowd, which is white males," according to Angela. One person claimed that the bar had a quota--so many Blacks are let in, but no more. Such a claim could not be substantiated. This person went on to say that if too many Blacks were admitted, then people would perceive the bar as a "Black bar" which is not what the staff wants. Robert, a Black male who goes to the bar rarely says that although he knows the bar to be racist and sexist he has gone a few times and "paid for his own oppression." Once inside, he says the bar is "tired, just plain tired." Some of the white people questioned were not aware of any racism on the part of the bar. Mike, however, said, "If you want to change the bar, then you must change the attitude of the racist people who go there, not the racist owners." Jim sees that although the bar is not perfect, it has made recent strides to try to improve racial relations there, more so than the bar in Raleigh, the Capital Corral. "I would not lay one penny on the counter of the CC," he said.

Another area of controversy is the apparent lack of community involvement on the part of the bar. Besides providing a place to dance and socialize, the Power Company does not get involved in community action, like many bars in other cities. As Alex said, "As much money as that bar takes in from gay people each week, you'd think they could put some of it back into the community. But do you see the Power Company holding AIDS benefit shows, sponsoring health clinics, allowing gay groups to hold meetings at the bar, or donating money to the gay organizations in the area? No!" Robert claimed that the bar did nothing at all for the community except "adding to our dependence on alcohol." While most people feel that this situation is unlikely to change as long as the bar is owned by a straight man. It must be noted, however, that the bar does distribute literature by the Lesbian and Gay Health Project and that the bar's advertising in The Front Page has kept that newspaper going.

Rumors continually spread that a new gay bar will open in the area soon, but for now, like it or not, the Power Company is the only bar we've got without driving to Raleigh or Greensboro.

-James Mills



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