

HANG OUTS

This is the first in an occasional series of stories on popular local gathering places.

Great Notch Inn



MICHAEL KARAS / Herald News

Rich Hempel owns and operates the Great Notch Inn, opened in 1939 by his grandfather, Greg DiLeo. The old dwelling that holds the roadhouse was moved onto the property along the westbound lanes of Route 46 shortly after the highway was constructed.

Little Falls roadhouse draws diverse clientele for brews, the blues

By RACHEL SCHEIER
Herald News

The Great Notch Inn, the old roadhouse on Route 46 in Little Falls, opened in 1939, the same year the highway was built.

Its owner was an irascible man named Greg DiLeo, who is a local legend. He told stories, insulted people, and cultivated eccentric habits, like imitating train whistles. "The customer is never right," was his catch phrase.

His grandson, Rich Hempel, is a big, friendly guy of 40 who looks like a drummer in a band, which he is. He's the kind of man who calls

women "honey" in a good way. He gets along with everyone.

"If you're cool with people, they're cool with you," he says.

Hempel, along with his laconic, movie-watching bartender, Gary Mohren, runs the Great Notch seven nights a week. On most of them, there are live local bands, mostly playing the blues. Hempel doesn't believe in bouncers or two-dollar drink specials. There is no big-screen TV.

Before Greg DiLeo opened the Great Notch, he ran a speakeasy, which later became a pancake and hot dog joint called the Green Chateau. The new highway displaced that busi-

ness in the late '30s. As the story goes, DiLeo paid a dollar for an old house nearby that was scheduled for demolition. He had it rolled on logs to its current spot on what is now the west side of the highway. He ran the business with his wife, Florence, until his death in 1988. She did the cooking. For many years, they lived with their two children in the apartment upstairs.

Especially in his later years, DiLeo was infamous for ejecting patrons of his bar for no particular reason: He refused service to anyone who smoked, didn't dress properly or otherwise displeased him. Hempel, on the other hand, cannot

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