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## **THE DART BARS OF...ST. LOUIS (by Janet Searcy)**

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When it comes to dart pubs, I'm with Ernest Hemingway: give me a clean, well-lighted place. But where are the dart pubs of yesteryear? The frequency with which these emporia change their character (i.e., eliminate their boards) is breathtaking. I have spent many an evening tooling around unfamiliar towns trying to find the places advertised in the Yellow Pages, only to discover that they are (a) out of business entirely, (b) now set up as discos with rollerskating waitresses, or (c) one-board establishments with a small dining table directly beneath the spider. Every other month or so I find myself away from home on business, with nothing legal to do in the evenings. Since I travel alone, I have to exercise a certain degree of caution on new turf. We all know that the best places are often in grungy neighborhoods, places where you wouldn't mind taking your sister but wouldn't want her to go by herself. This article - and the ones that follow in subsequent issues of **Bullseye News** - will try to describe the dart pubs I've found that meet my standards for safety and charm. And, believe me, there *are* dart bars with charm.

St. Louis is a good place to find some. My connections with the town go back almost 20 years, to when I did my undergraduate work at Washington U. of St. Louis's two premier dart pubs. One was a regular hangout at that time, although I don't remember seeing any boards back in the mid-sixties.

**Santoro's**, at the intersection of Big Bend and Millbrook Boulevards just off the northwest corner of the campus, has been a mecca for the young and thirsty for years and years. Its owners, Andy and Susie (Santoro) Garamella, still tend the bar and tables themselves, (I can personally vouch for the fact that Susie knows how to make time stand still - she looks exactly like she did in 1966.) The food runs to burgers and pizzas and can best be described as Italian ordinaire.

The darting situation at Santoro's is much better than ordinary, though. On the main floor there are a half dozen boards, well lighted and off to the side. Wednesday night is league night, and Santoro's has several teams shooting in the A through C divisions in interbar competition. More boards wait in the basement for overflow crowds during tournaments.

Atmosphere is not the calling card at 'Toro's. But the crowd, a mixture of college kids and locals from the University City area, is uniformly relaxed and friendly. The neighborhood is safe, and you can get there on the bus (it's a scant mile west of city limits).

If you find yourself in St. Louis mid-week, don't hesitate to drop in on league night. The teams often find themselves short a shooter and will take on visitors to fill in.

Undoubtedly, the best-known dart pub in St. Louis is **Blueberry Hill**. This bar and restaurant, founded in 1972 by Joe Edwards and his wife, Linda, is the home of the Blueberry Hill Open, the oldest pub-sponsored dart tournament in the country.

The Hill is also in University City, but a longish walk (over a mile) from Santoro's. It occupies almost a whole block of the commercial strip on Delmar, less than a half mile west of city limits. The neighborhood, called the U. City Loop, is a little racey, so keep your eyes open on the way in from the parking lot.

Once inside, you won't have any trouble with your eyes. There's something neat to look at in every nook and cranny of the Hill. As its name implies, Blueberry Hill is a 'fifties bar - complete with what is probably the country's best jukebox of oldies and whole walls covered with album covers by Tommy Sands, Annette, Fabian, and the like.

Joe Edwards' record collection, which rotates through the jukebox biweekly, includes every top 10 popular, rock, and R&B single on the Billboard Charts since January 1950. Altogether, Joe owns 30,000 records, including 12,000 seventy-eights from the *really* old days.

The bar is divided into four chambers - a video game room, the barroom itself, a tables-and-booths dining area, and the darts room (which also has a half-dozen video games and maybe 15 tables for diners and watchers).

The barroom and restaurant areas are full of old St. Louis memorabilia, such as papier-mache animals from floats in the Veiled Prophet parade and posters of former Cardinals baseball greats. There is one lighted case displaying lunch boxes just like you carried to grade school (you know, Roy Rogers with Dale Evans on the back), and another of Howdy Doody stuff.

The bar itself is a beauty - twenty feet of mahogany circa 1870, with a sixteen-foot mirror. Plant your feet on the brass rail and chat with managers Phil Carmody or Mike Peters, both of whom shoot darts. The rest of the help are young and unpretentious, the food surprisingly good (A plus on burgers and French fries), and the crowd a real mixture of ages and backgrounds.

Beer is the drink of choice at Blueberry Hill. Joe Edwards has invented his own - Rock-n-Roll Beer, which is made for him in Philadelphia and marketed in several U.S. cities and throughout Japan and the islands of the South Pacific. (Would you believe that in Micronesia, one of Rock-n-Roll's best markets, per-person consumption among folks over 14 is 9.7 12-ounce bottles a day?) You can also get the usual American and European beers, as well as the full range of mixed drinks.

Suitably fortified, you make your way into the darts room. Beaming down at you from above are the faces of the Open Singles winners from the last 12 Blueberry Hill tournaments. Included are John Reichwein (many times over), John Hediger, Eddie Steitz, Fred Steeg, Jerry Pavlick, K.C. Mullaney, and Jerry Baker, the 1984 winner.

The ten or so boards are kept in good condition, and each is well lighted. There is a narrow wooden rail a few feet behind the line, which serves to hold your drinks and accessories and separates you from the onlookers. A very utilitarian device, and overlooked by most bars.

Over the years, Joe has expanded the setup every time another adjacent storefront became vacant, and this year he reached the point where there was only one way to go - down. His \$25,000 renovation of the basement has provided the Hill with 15 more boards, permanently mounted.

So far, the basement has been used only for the annual tournament, but Joe plans to start monthly tournaments early this summer and expand to weekly events on Saturday or Sunday shortly thereafter. In fact, the \$5,000 Lucky Strike Filters St. Louis Open is being held at the Hill on June 15-17, 1984.

Wednesday is league night, with shooting on three levels (A, B, and C). Interbar competition with teams from Santoro's is a regular feature. You can find a friendly game any day of the week, starting around the cocktail hour (although the Hill is open from lunch on, the shooters don't come out until late afternoon).

Mark your calendar now for the 1985 Blueberry Hill Open: February 23-25. I've attended the last three, and in my opinion the tournament is more fun than those held in hotel ballrooms. This year, over 400 people competed, including Conrad Daniels and Nicky Virachkul among the household names. I lasted exactly one round in the Women's Blind-Draw Doubles (thank you, Marty Doore) and got back my entry fee plus a couple of bucks. So, the tournament is run properly. That is, money does come right back to the competitors. The return has jumped every year, and 1985 may well see a \$12,000 guarantee. Payouts have generally exceeded the promised amounts.

All the regular shooters in St. Louis will agree that this two-gun salute to the local pubs is not a complete list. Devotees of the **Sanctuary**, somewhere in south St. Louis, will swear by their Saturday-night weekly tournaments. But I couldn't personally vouch for the Sanctuary, or **Beut's**, or any of the other spots. I still haven't gotten over the closing of **Garfield's**, a mainstay on South Grand Boulevard in a residential hotel. Now *that* was a Hemingway bar. Rumors fly around about the reopening, but nothing has been firmed up yet. If Garfield's comes back without darts, without Sunday shootouts, without the stellar French fries, well, the world will be a sadder place.