

Barkeeps master art of listening

Here's what they hear

By Diane Gale
staff writer

Jobs, the opposite sex and sports are the uppermost concerns of area residents, according to the experts — who pour your drinks.

Local bartenders agree learning to serve suds and concoct libations are secondary to mastering the art of listening to their customers.

Veteran bartenders assert they hear the same problems over and over, yet the majority shy away from giving advice.

While they're filling and refilling glasses they're getting an earful of the latest topics of conversation around town, and a handful have let us in on the secrets.

"People have confidence in their bartenders, so they come in, relax, have a few drinks and decide they want someone to talk to," according to Russ Hancock, the man behind the bar at Mr. Laff's on Orchard Lake.

"Usually you want to be a good listener, and I try not to give advice unless they ask," he said. "But very seldom do you hear a unique problem."

The stricter drunk driving laws that were enacted April 1, 1983 put a damper on sales, because people are "a little paranoid," said Hancock, who also serves as manager.

"But over time I think they will relax and go back to the way it was, which is a little unfortunate too," he said.

BERGE, WHO only goes by that name, serves drinks at D. Dennison's on Orchard Lake.

"Most businessmen talk about work or women," she said. "The women talk about the men, where to

Laura Scott, who stands on the inside of the counter at Dr. Doodles on Grand River, believes women wonder what men talk about in bars, and she's willing to reveal the mystery.

She lists sports and ex-wives as the major topics of conversation.

"A lot of people are laid off and they come in talking about looking for jobs," Scott said. "And businessmen talk about trying to meet their quotas."

"If people come in depressed I try to make them leave with a smile on their face," she said. "You have to have a lot of jokes up your sleeve."

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—Russ Hancock
Mr. Laff's

O'Sheehan's Tavern on Grand River has bartender Stella Barduca.

SHE CLAIMS the bartender's mood will determine the customer's state of mind.

"If you approach them with a good mood they have nice things to say," Barduca said. "It all depends on how you handle it."

"Ninety percent of the people who come in are regulars. So we just party mainly, but they listen to my problems more than I do their's, and they laugh about it saying it should be the other way around."

Barduca stops serving customers she believes are drinking too much sooner now than she did before the new laws, "because most of the customers are my friends," she said.

Lori Gill is one of the people drawing drinks at Dunleavy's Pub & Grub on Grand River, and she believes many people go to bars to get away from problems have a good time.

"Some people are quiet and others are boisterous, but you're bound to hear talk about sports and the weather," she said.

"I hear people talk about the economy — how screwed up it is, and when the things are gonna crack," Tom Brown, the bartender at Charley's on Farmington said.

Brown introduces regular customers to first timers in order to break the ice, and get them to talk.

"Depressed people talk about lack of money and their wives," Brown said. "But with the spring I think more people are getting back to work."

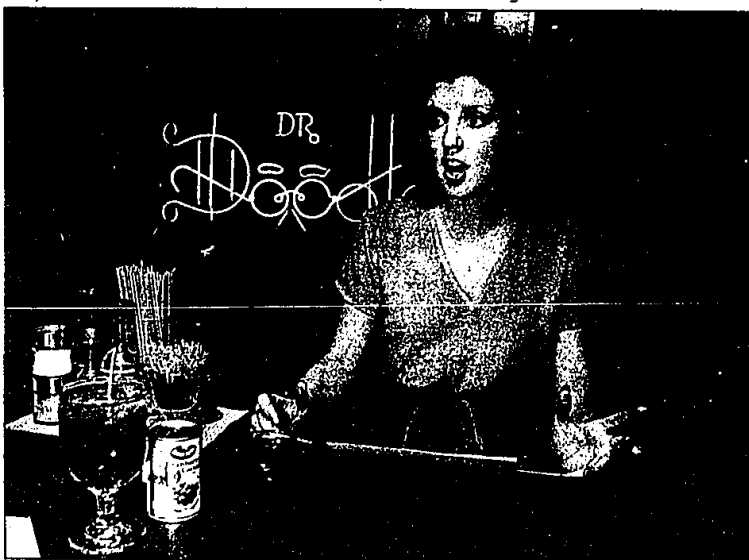
'I hear people talk about the economy — how screwed up it is — and when things are gonna crack.'

—Tom Brown

go, the plants in the tavern, the newest store in town, or they think up the greatest drinks with lots of things, like fruit, in them."

When her customers insist on advice Berge either "lies and tells them what they want to hear," or she counsels them to "hold off a couple of days and it will work itself out."

One of the fringe benefits of being a bartender is when they're driving home at 2 a.m. they can detect drunks, and they know how to anticipate the other driver's swerves, she said.



Photographs by RANDY BOST/Staff photographer



Laura Scott (above), who minds the bar at Dr. Doodles, a popular watering hole on Grand River, believes women wonder what men talk about in bars. Berge (left) tends to the faithful at D. Dennison's on Orchard Lake.

Russ Hancock (right) dispenses advice and drinks at Mr. Laff's.

Tom Brown (below) is the man behind the bar at Charley's place.



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