



News staff photos by Beverly Bradford

**"THIS IS THE WAY I LIKE TO LIVE"
Callahan at work in the Chukker**

Chukker

It's another country

By **DAVID MARSHALL**
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They remember the war they hated, and the times they marched and sang songs. They could hum the melody of "We Shall Overcome."

But the crusades and causes are gone, the crises passed. They gather at night on Sixth Street, clinging to their lifestyle, and to days gone by.

Their place is called the Chukker.



ATMOSPHERE, NO DECOR
Chukker Nation prefers it

The walls are painted dark green. At night, juke box music chops its way through the crowd and spills loud notes onto the sidewalk.

Inside, the people share talk and cheap beer.

Around them, photographs stuck to the wall are peeling away. On the ceiling, there is a painting modeled after Michelangelo's work in Vatican City. But this painting is different, crude, perhaps. Bob Callahan, one of two young men who own the bar, terms it "Sistine Chukker."

In the bar, the floor is tile. There are holes in the ceiling and footprints on the walls. No smiling young women in hot pants come to take orders. No plush drapes cover the walls. This is another country.

Callahan, who answers to "Cal," said most of his customers are 25 or older. They found the bar in some other year in the two decades it has been open. Now, they keep coming back. Coming back.

What they find is a holdover from earlier days, when the world whirled around coffee houses with folk music and sad and blue guitars.

Cal said the bar once had a large homosexual clientele, but other places

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News Staff Photo by Beverly Bradford

"THE LIFESTYLE THEY LIKE"
Some have been customers a decade

It's another country

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took that business away. Some "gays" still come in, he said.

Some of almost every kind of person comes in at one time or another.

"Anybody can come in here, as long as they don't bother anybody else," Cal said. "That's the only rule we have. I don't care if they are gay or green."

In an adjoining room, there are pinball machines and pool tables sitting on a concrete floor. The room is not air conditioned, and the heat hangs heavy over the clang of bells and clatter of balls.

Generally, younger people use that portion of the Chukker. But, according to Callahan, the bar never has had a problem with underage drinkers, even when the legal age was 21. "I think they were afraid of it (the place)," Callahan said.

No drugs are apparent in the Chukker. There are few fights. Mostly, people sit around bare wood tables and talk.

"The furniture here is rummage sale," Cal said. He pointed to a table a man made and traded to him for beer.

Nobody seems to mind the furniture. There is atmosphere, but no decor, Cal said. To decorate the place differently would be to destroy the atmosphere.

In that atmosphere, some people shout. People smile. People frown. This is the world of the Chukker Nation. People who do not feel at home here are not required to return.

The name for the people who go to the bar found its roots in the late sixties, when a great rock festival at Woodstock shook the country. Young people of that day called themselves the "Woodstock Nation." Many of the people of the Chukker remember Woodstock. They remember the years, years and years ago. They all were so much younger then.

There must have been a thousand bars like the Chukker at one time, where people talked and wrote checks to pay for a single beer. Now, most of them are gone, and for many, the Chukker provides a place where the lifestyle goes on.

Callahan and Lewis Fitts bought the place in May, 1974. Cal is the operator.

"This is not a bar," he said. "This is a neighborhood beer joint."

The Chukker's neighborhood is vast. People come there from all over the Tuscaloosa area, from all professions.

One night, a quick food restaurant operator sat at a table with a mental health worker, a university professor and a postman. Some of the city's attorneys know the place well. And, sometimes, people who have been away for years come back, look at the pictures on the wall, and remember long-forgotten faces.

Cal said his income is not impressive. "You don't make money selling beer for 50 cents. You would have to love the place to work here."

Cal tended bar at the Chukker during the three years he attended the University of Alabama. And he managed it for awhile, before he and Fitts took over.

Cal comes from a background he describes as upper middle class. His father is a corporation president.

Cal said he could find another job, and probably make more money. But, at the Chukker, he said, "I can live the lifestyle I choose to live and work around people I have something in common with."

He looked over the dingy dark room. "This is their lifestyle," he said of the people there. "I couldn't live the way I want to live if I took another job. This is the way I like to live."

Around the room, patrons of the Chukker could tell a thousand stories of things that have happened there. Now, they have jobs, and their college years are behind them. Often, their work is respectable, their functions important in the community. But, at night, they are people of faded blue jeans and khaki shirts.

"I just don't think the old hippies have faded away," Cal said.

In downtown Tuscaloosa, in rooms many people never see, the Chukker goes on. The memories go on. New memories are built for another time.

Cal looked out from his long hair and beard and talked about his job. "I guess it would be like the curator of a museum," he said. "That's what this place is. It's a museum."