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Bars find their niche

David van den Berg
The Arizona Republic
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It's 6 a.m. on Sunday and Rosie McCaffrey's opens its doors for supporters of Celtic, a Scottish soccer team.

For John Burns of Gilbert, getting to the Phoenix pub so early isn't a problem.

"To see Celtic, it's not an effort," he said.
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Rosie McCaffrey's is just one bar in the Valley that caters to a particular niche of sports fans. A sports bar in Gilbert features a sushi chef plying his trade in front of a row of big-screen TVs, and one in Phoenix caters to a mostly gay clientele.

Michael Harrelson, editor of *Nightclub and Bar* magazine, a trade publication in Oxford, Miss., said the number of bars is growing and sports bars are leading that growth. He also said bars finding a sports niche are a relatively new trend and cited Fox Sports Grill, which has a Scottsdale location, as a prime example of the upscale niche.

"It's sort of like the eternal question of how many casinos can open in Las Vegas - that's probably the hottest concept going right now," Harrelson said.

Michael Richter, general manager of Fox Sports Grill in Scottsdale, said the grill tries to cater to white-collar, more sophisticated customers. Food is not served in baskets, beer is not served in pitchers, and the grill offers a full dining room and a cigar lounge.

"I think you have to definitely know your clientele and know what you're targeting," Richter said. "I can't have the cheapest beer and have this kind of decor."

Across the Valley, Richter said, "a lot of corner little places that have a few TVs call themselves sports bars," but few commit themselves to it because of the expense.

"The reality is not all of them can afford to buy every package, every NBA, every NFL, every college football package - it gets relatively expensive," he said.

Harrelson attributed the growth in the number of bars to the growing popularity of



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Nick de la Torre/The Arizona Republic
Janice Gallagher of Phoenix (left) and the Celtic Supporters Club react to a play in a televised soccer match at Rosie McCaffrey's.

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high-end drinks. Still, the lifespan of many bars and clubs, including sports bars, is short, Harrelson said, so sports bars must set themselves apart.

"I don't know how much further it can go, but I'm sure there are people out there looking to find that out right now, what the next one is going to be, and whoever answers that question is probably going to make a lot of money," Harrelson said.

Crowds for weekend soccer matches at Rosie McCaffrey's can reach about 30, even though alcohol can't be served before 10 a.m. on Sunday. A close-knit crowd of about 15 people showed up for last weekend's Celtic game, dining on coffee and doughnuts and cheering Celtic to a 4-2 victory.

For Saturday games, the suds flow early.

"Guinness goes well with a doughnut," said Seamus McCaffrey, one of the two owners, who pay about \$7,000 per season for the Celtic satellite package. He recovers the cost by charging membership fees for the Celtic Supporters Club and a per game fee to non-members, plus a weekly raffle.

Roscoes on 7th, a sports bar on Seventh Street in Phoenix, caters to the gay community, sporting the motto, "Drag is not a sport," and displays plaques of gay softball-league teams.

Mark Dills of Phoenix said he frequents Roscoes because it's a gay bar and has great television sets, most of which feature the Monday Night Football game. The bar brings in a friendly crowd, Dills said.

"Everybody here pretty much gets along," he said.

Days that bring in big crowds at Roscoes are Sundays during the NFL season, Super Bowl Sunday and the day of Phoenix's Gay Pride Parade and Festival. Not everyone who goes to Roscoes is gay, co-owner Justin Alt said.

"When somebody comes in with straight friends, they're always surprised that it's a gay bar," Alt said. "It's not your typical gay bar."

Just as soccer fans and gay sports fans have places to go, people who want to eat sushi and watch sports have Sushi TV Bar in Gilbert. The bar is smoke-free and, in one of its two rooms, features stadium seating with all televisions facing the same way. David Wong, who owns the business with his wife, Cacey, said more than half the orders are sushi.

Alfredo Pinon of Gilbert said he goes there about four times a week and appreciates the diversity of the menu.

"It's not just all about chicken wings and cheeseburgers and chili fries," he said.

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