

Everyone's welcome -- it's 'Bout Time

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"We need to go to 'Bout Time," the fabulous Susan declared, several months ago. She'd seen it, on the I-35 access road, just north of Rundberg. She'd been intrigued, she'd looked it up and found it was a moderately well-known gay bar, and she'd determined it should be included in my professional bar rounds. And what Susan has decreed, let no one defy . . .

'Bout Time looks a lot like the Poodle Dog from the outside -- squat, square, unappealing. But where the Poodle Dog has a poodle dog painted on the side, the 'Bout Time has a clock -- as in, It's about time you got in here (where it smells not unlike the Poodle Dog, I might add).

Inside is a long rectangle bar area, dartboards off to one side, a DJ booth to the other, video games all over and everywhere a low-down divey feel. People are friendly. And by people, I mean all kinds of people: gay men; lesbians; straight beer-drinking guys; the occasional het couple; transvestites; older people; brown people; preppy people; lots of blue-collar people; transgender, biracial people; drunk men who want to buy you a drink but don't speak a word of English; and a few who could be any combination of the above. I've never seen so many kinds of people in one place -- though the crowd was, for the most part, not young.

Most seem to know each other -- the regulars clearly make up the majority of the crowd - - but everyone was perfectly happy to talk to Susan and me or leave us to our conversation. I know, I know, lots of places are "friendly." But this place really was friendly. If you sit at the bar, be prepared to engage in conversation much as you would at a small-town pie social. When Susan went to the bar to get change for cigarettes from the vending machine, a woman sitting there suggested she buy them at the liquor store next door. (There's also an adult store next-next door, but they don't sell smokes.) Later, the woman made a point of coming by our table and telling us that the liquor store closed at 8, so if we wanted smokes, we'd best hurry up. Very neighborly of her.

The 'Bout Time is big on events. Like the volleyball games that are played on the bar's outdoor court. It looks like fun -- lots of seating, a kind of platform/playscape with Peanuts figures drawn on it and, of course, the sounds of the freeway nearby. Sunday and Monday nights are all about karaoke; other days feature a "Rude" happy hour, DJs and the occasional Friday night silent auction for charity. One Tuesday night, I witnessed semi-coherent madness during the weekly dart tournament; a guy reached into his pocket for his lighter and came out with fistfuls of condoms. He'd stolen all the prophylactics and lubricant from the bathroom and then, in his exuberant state, forgotten them till he piled them on the bar. When he realized what he'd done, he seemed almost gleeful -- though he did protest that he'd never actually need the lubricant; he'd stolen it by accident, he said. (I'm guessing he's straight; my gaydar's reasonably good.)

When I did some Web research into the 'Bout Time bar, I found some poems, written by Ms. Bobbi Williams, a local transvestite. The following is an excerpt from one of them:

Then come to 'Bout Time
in boy or girl face;
we'll wait for you there
and save you a place.
We'll say welcome home
and together we'll chime
"We've been waiting for you"
Where've you been?
It's 'bout time!"

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'Bout Time: 6901 N. Interstate 35; 832-5339;

2 p.m.-2 a.m. daily