

COMMON THREAD IN THESE PUBS: SPORTS

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Publication Date: November 30, 2006 Page: 12 Section: XLEnt Edition: Final

I was thinking of Walt Whitman this morning, re-reading "Song of Myself" and envying. "I loafe and invite my soul,/ I lean and loafe at my ease," Whitman says, and later, "Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned the earth much?" That's exactly what I want to do right now — reckon the earth. Doesn't it sound lovely? Let's all go observe leaves of grass.

But instead of reckoning, I've watched a lot of football. On a recent Saturday, my boyfriend and I went to Legends to catch a little gridiron. Legends, the sports bar in the Arboretum Holiday Inn, displays 32 screens, including plasmas and two big screens — and all of them are tuned to sports.

The joint offers nearly every sports package; wireless Internet access (for those of you playing fantasy games); arcade games (but it costs \$1 to play a single game of Ms. Pac-Man); happy hour specials from 4-7 p.m. Monday-Friday; Bloody Mary specials on weekend mornings; nine beers on tap — mostly of the Budweiser variety, but also Guinness and Dos Equis; just over two dozen beers in bottles; a full bar; Pepsi products on the soda gun (not Coke ones, which the waiters didn't warn me about . . . grrrr . . . Coke is available in cans); and wings and burgers and ribs and salmon to eat.

About 200 people could fit into the Legends bar; the seating, while plentiful at 153 chairs and barstools, also leaves room for standing — or jumping up suddenly should your team score. And Legends is home for a number of out-of-state fans; the bar works closely with the Big 10 alumni associations and is building up its Pittsburgh Steelers base. Florida and Florida State games also regularly prove a big draw, according to the bar honcho Nick Curra.

After we left Legends, John and I headed over to his friends' house for a home brew party — some football watching (USC vs. Cal), some mighty fine chili and some finer beer. And then we met up with in-town-for-Thanksgiving Whiskey Susan and the slam poets at the newly renovated Common Interest for karaoke shenanigans.

The new, post-fire, open almost-a-year-now CI is cleaner and shinier, but it feels a lot the same. Poker's still the name of the game in the back room. There's still a tiny karaoke machine in a side room for more private singalong moments, and there's still popcorn. But the main draw has been revamped. Four microphones on the stage — plus a new dance floor — create a rock band feeling when you and your friends get up to sing. Like when fabulous Susan and the lovely-voiced Chris sang "Heartbreaker" — each had plenty of room to sing, watch the other, and do some booty shaking, rather than huddle around a single mike. The song list is updated regularly, with 269 pages of songs.

And, of course, Common Interest is also a sports bar — a fact which never fails to amuse me. Karaoke, poker and sports? Who knew? But they've got 13 brand-new flat screen

HD TV's, sports memorabilia, football packages, NTN Trivia, QB1. Highlights played in the background while my friends sang.

We completely crashed before John got to sing (he does a mean Cheap Trick) and headed home. And as we climbed into bed, it wasn't Whitman I thought of, but my grandmother's sage advice): Do and see as much as possible, she encouraged. After all, she'd say, you can sleep when you're dead.

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Common Interest. 8440 Burnet Road, 453-6796. Legends Sports Bar & Grill. 8901 Business Park Drive, 634-3200.