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A family of four huddled in a back corner, standing as they ate their pizza, their eyes squinting and searching for the stage. They arrived promptly when the event was beginning, but by then it was too late. The space had already been reduced to standing room only.

The event, The Conch, had been advertised as “Gainesville’s five-minute true storytelling project.” Last Tuesday was the first of its kind.

At 5:30 Tuesday night, an hour and a half before it began, Lightnin’ Salvage Enterprises (LSE) in the back of Satchel’s Pizza was filled to maximum occupancy. The tables were full, all of the extra foldout chairs were occupied, and if you were lucky enough to snag a seat, you stayed there for the rest of the night.

The second Tuesday of every month, Grow Radio will continue to host the event at Satchel’s Pizza, located at 1800 NE 23rd Ave.

The ground rules for kickoff of Grow Radio’s event were only that the story should be about five minutes, notes were not encouraged and it must be true. Any subjects were allowed, but the theme of this month was “there is a first time for everything.”

Customers were hesitant at first to write their names on pieces of paper and drop it in the hat, waiting to be called up by Dave O’Gorman, the event’s emcee.

However, as the night continued on, and more draft beers were sold, the customers began to loosen up and more freely ventured toward the stage without even having put their name in the hat. By the end of the night, about 20 people had shared stories.

Bill Bryson, Grow Radio station general manager, launched the Internet radio station three years ago and last Tuesday also launched The Conch storytelling event as part of the Grow Radio program.

The Moth and This American Life, other Internet radio stations, are what inspired Bryson to launch this event. After reviewing all of the recorded audio stories from the event, Bryson hopes to broadcast individual stories later in the month or create a podcast.

“This has been in the works for about a year now. I teamed up with Satchel Raye a while ago, he’s a friend of mine and I knew he had some interest in a storytelling event like this,” Bryson said. “We had hoped to launch it earlier in the year, right about the time of the fire, but that set us back some.”

Bryson had arranged for a two hour time slot at Lightnin’ Salvage, but he originally thought that it would be too long for the first night. Bryson had not planted any seeds in the crowd. If customers were not participating, Bryson intended to have his emcee, O’Gorman, switch off telling stories with him to keep the night going.

This tactic was not needed in the end, due to the eagerness of customers to share the ins and outs of their personal lives. However, Bryson still decided to share a story of his own, about his first car crash. O’Gorman also read a story aloud as well.

In the future, Bryson said they will be able to stay past the allotted time until customers seem uninterested, as long as it is helping Satchel’s business and not hurting it.

The theme for August 14 at 7 p.m. will be “every dog has its day.” Bryson has high hopes that it will once again exceed his expectations and will again be thrilled at the turnout.

“Eventually, I hope to reach the entire community with this event,” Bryson said. “I just really want to leave it open to anyone and everyone.”

Grow Radio’s kickoff of The Conch this past Tuesday was nothing less than successful, “and saying that is an understatement,” said entertainment coordinator and bartender Danny Lore.

“Any music or event that happens here and gets on the stage at LSE, in the back of Satchel’s Pizza, is put on the calendar by me,” Lore said. “I oversee all of the events for the most part, and The Conch has been the most successful one in a while.”

Jordan Borstelmann, bartender at LSE, said he could pretty much estimate the success of the events based upon how much was sold at the bar.

Borstelmann assumed that The Conch would have a good first night, but “this just blew the expectations away. You could see it on people’s faces, they didn’t think it would be this packed either.”

Borstelmann said that he bets that anyone who hadn’t heard of Grow Radio before this would be sure to check out the Internet radio as soon as they got home. “It definitely sparked my curiosity,” Borstelmann said.

The bartenders were constantly moving from the time well before the event started to the time that it ended, and were unable to participate in this month’s themed storytelling night. However, both intend on sharing a story next month, even if it means having someone take over for the five minutes of their story.

Dan Svonavec, a dishwasher at Satchel’s, said, “There are certain bands that will draw more business. There are certain bands that for whatever reason will draw more basil. There’s a certain band that plays that when they play, keep the basil chopped all night because everybody gets it for whatever reason when they play.”

Tuesday night, Borstelman confirmed this. He found that the basil was more popular during The Conch storytelling event. “We’ll be sure to be prepared for that next month again, too.”

Sources:

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