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Real Irish pubs aren't nearly as popular

BY KITTY McCONNELL

Fearing large St. Paddy's Day crowds, Night Moves and companions stopped by the **Brazenhead** twice last week for an early Irish pub fix. Evidently the rest of Columbus had the same idea.

First, we arrived at the Brazenhead's Grandview-area location to find it was standing room only, even though it was just another Wednesday night. A second visit on Friday, this time to the bar's original location in Dublin, also found the place buzzing. The crowd seemed a bit more raucous than usual as people came out in droves to stretch St. Patrick's Day '08—which fell on a Monday—into a weekend-long celebration.

At 10 p.m. Friday, our bartenders were already preparing for the coming storm, overstocking their beer coolers and conferring as to whether they should cut off a boisterous group that had ordered three trays of Irish Carbombs within a 15-minute span. Normally, you don't see Dublin 9-to-5'ers yelling "Hey-oh!" à la Bret Michaels and leading chug chants, but Friday was an entertaining exception. The bartenders, while as good-natured and prompt as they generally are at the Brazenhead, were pacing themselves to make it through the Irish holiday weekend.

Brazenhead Grandview and its fraternal twin in Dublin aim to execute the syndicated Irish pub theme better than any other chain bar of the same genre in Columbus, and they absolutely hit the mark. The Brazenheads are of good stock, styled and run by Historic Dublin Restaurants, the same group that owns Oscar's and Tucci's, two medium-price-range wine bars serving American and wood-fired cuisine in Dublin, and Barnum and Tibbits, an upscale steakhouse near Polaris.

The wide spirit list, paired with a kitchen menu of well-chosen standards and variations on traditional pub grub, make both Brazenheads regular options in the rotation of possible happy-hour destinations. Wednesday is undoubtedly their most

popular week night, thanks to the \$3 burger special, as we found out when we couldn't score a seat on either level of the Fifth Avenue location. Very few things go quite so well with a pint as a giant burger and thin-cut pub chips. If you're going to the Grandview location on a Wednesday, just be prepared to snag your table or snug early—there's nothing suave about standing and wrestling with a 10-ounce burger in a room full of the city's most eligible after-work crowd.

Both Brazenheads are multilevel buildings with bars upstairs and down. The main rooms are meandering and allow equal opportunity to sit in a spot where one can be seen or to hide out in a snug for privacy. The snugs—booths set into partitioned rooms similar in size and intimacy to railway sleeping compartments—are always solid choices for a first date. The barrooms, for that matter, seem to be reliable places for scoring that first date.

The bars draw a professional crowd, mostly in their mid-20s to late 40s. The



NIGHT MOVES

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Grandview patrons run a little younger and, therefore, tend to be a little louder when they're imbibing.

Both locations are equipped with fantastic square patios in neighborhoods facing busy streets. Their interiors are similarly styled, their main bars and most of their décor having been imported directly from Ireland. This, presumably, is meant to lend some credibility to the "authentic Irish" theme, though one wonders how many Ohio bar-goers could distinguish between items taken from a genuine rural pub and those that merely look like they were.

The actual items must be in abundant supply, as traditional pubs in rural Ireland are dying out in record numbers, according to a Feb. 23 *Irish Times* article that attributes the daily closings to smoking bans, increasingly strict drunk-driving laws and a transfer of licenses to carryouts and newer urban bars.

Meanwhile, Central Ohio's Brazenheads were thriving this past weekend despite an increased police presence on Columbus roadways and the statewide smoking ban. They've perfected the Irish pub atmosphere and have a devoted following to show for it.

Perhaps their mentors should consider collecting royalties.

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