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BEER TOWN

Brick Store marks 10 very good years

By [BOB TOWNSEND](#)
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If you wandered into the Brick Store Pub on the night it opened — June 27, 1997 — you might have heard something like "One Angry Dwarf and 200 Solemn Faces" by Ben Folds Five playing. And you might have bellied up to the horseshoe-shaped bar, surveyed the newly exposed brick walls, and been coaxed into ordering a Dogwood or Blind Man pale ale on draft. Then you might have puzzled over the absence of television sets, neon signs and mega domestic lagers, such as Bud, Coors or Miller Lite.

The Brick Store celebrates its 10th anniversary this month. There still aren't any televisions, neon signs or megabeers. But there have been plenty of other changes, both subtle and dramatic.



BOB TOWNSEND/Special (ENLARGE)

Brick Store Pub partners (from left) Mike Gallagher, Tom Moore and Dave Blanchard.

Starting with very little money and lots of sweat equity and enthusiasm, partners Dave Blanchard, Tom Moore and Mike Gallagher first made an old beauty parlor on Decatur Square into a convivial neighborhood pub. Later, they transformed it into what is widely considered to be one of the best beer bars in the country, if not the world.

As ranked on the two biggest online beer-geek sites, the Brick Store is currently No. 9 (in the world) at [ratebeer.com](#) and No. 15 (in the United States) at [beeradvocate.com](#).

Somehow, though, as Blanchard, Moore and Gallagher sit at an upstairs table surveying their domain and reflecting on a decade of serving up beer (along with wine, cocktails and pub grub), the former University of Georgia buddies sound more like true believers than savvy entrepreneurs.

"The first night," remembers Gallagher, "we thought we were rich. All three of us were bartending, and people were throwing money at us because they knew how hard we'd been working to get the place open. We ended up making about \$500 in tips. At that point we'd been eating turkey sandwiches for about three months, so we thought it was the greatest night of our lives."

That sort of passion mixed with humility has continued to be a trademark of the Brick Store experience — even as the crowds have swelled, the partners sometimes shake their heads, regretting no longer being able to recognize every person who comes in, and having had to institute a waiting list on weekends.

"We're big on karma," says Moore without a trace of irony.

But success is also clearly exciting for the trio, who describe getting "pumped" for their daily work routines — which still often revolve around Moore working in the kitchen and Blanchard and Gallagher tending bar and waiting on customers. And success is certainly what's allowed the Brick to expand and grow, spurring and reflecting the increasingly sophisticated tastes of its customers.

In 1997, the best-selling beer was Warsteiner, a light German lager. In 2007, it's St. Bernardus Abt 12, a strong Belgian ale. Leading up to the 10th anniversary, there's a different exotic or rare beer offering every night.

"Craft breweries and importers want to send us completely random, weird stuff now," Blanchard says. "And that makes us just that much more of a presence in the beer community and really gets people talking more about what we do."

The watershed moment for the Brick Store (and every other serious beer bar in the state) was the 2004 state law that made higher-alcohol beers legal in Georgia. In response, Blanchard, Moore and Gallagher went to work again and built what became known as "the Belgian bar."

The expansion — "upstairs and to the left" is the way a Brick Store T-shirt

BOB TOWNSEND BEER PICK



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• Bob Townsend is editor of Southern Brew News, a bimonthly beer publication distributed throughout the Southeast.

describes its location — features eight draft taps and more than 120 bottles of Belgian and Belgian-style beers. Downstairs, where there once were 13 draft lines and a handful of imported, local and regional specialty beers, there now are 17 draft and more than 65 bottled beers in rotation. Adding to the mix more recently have been the popular monthly beer and cheese tastings and periodic beer dinners, with selected breweries bringing in special treats.

The next really big act for Blanchard, Moore and Gallagher will probably take place sometime early next year. They are renovating a building they bought in Grant Park, where they plan to open another beer bar and restaurant — though it won't be known as the Brick Store, and the food will lean toward more seasonal and organic offerings.

Summing up the move into a second decade in business with Blanchard and Gallagher, Moore laughs and says, "We got married, we bought a house, and

we had kids. Now we're going to go buy another house."

• **The 10th-anniversary celebration** continues at the Brick Store with nightly beer specials through Wednesday. Closed Sunday for a private party. 125 East Court Square, Decatur, 404-687-0990, www.brickstorepub.com.

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