



Milwaukee LGBT History Project, Inc.

M & M Club

Bar & Restaurant

The M & M Club was one of Milwaukee's favorite GLBT destinations for almost 30 years from the time it was opened on July 4, 1976 by community activist Bob Schmidt, with partners Leo Peters and Jim Moes. A mecca for men and women alike, the Club long served the gay and lesbian community. The bar was housed in the Pabst Brewing Co. Saloon and Boarding House built in 1904, which the M&M Club renovated in 1987.

In 1980 Bob commissioned Milwaukee's premier artist, Robert Uyvari, to design an outdoor patio. This was the beginning of a long collaboration between Uyvari and the M&M.

The M&M Club also had the longest-operating restaurant of any LGBT business in Milwaukee with a full-service restaurant, serving the community since the early 1980's. Initially called The Sidebar, the restaurant finally took off with the addition of Sunday brunch and Friday fish fries. The restaurant became so popular it prompted the addition of a glass atrium/greenhouse on the north side of the building in 1983; to be known as the Glass Menagerie Restaurant.

The M&M Club established a reputation for sponsoring events connected to the performing arts. The Club regularly organized meal and play packages for visiting arts performances often followed by cast parties.

The Club, staff, and customers were also intimately involved in the community as a whole. The Club sponsored teams in softball, darts and other leagues, and also sponsored various fundraisers benefiting the local AIDS and other community betterment organizations. They made their banquet room available for annual flu shots, anonymous AIDS screenings, and similar health-directed efforts.

By 1985 Bob Schmidt had bought out both partners, Leo and Jim, and Bob continued to run the business day to day. But after 25 years, Bob sold the business to one of his long-time employees, BooBoo, while retaining ownership of the building.

In April 2006, Bob sold the building to a company planning to open a new Irish pub. The M&M closed forever at 2am on Sunday, May 14, 2006. Anniversary parties have been held for this bar multiple times, including one commemorating 10 years after its close, in 2016.



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Joe Brehm

‘This Is It’ bar

Joseph Thomas Brehm (1942–2016; “Joe” to everyone) was the owner and manager of ‘This Is It’ bar for almost his entire adult life. The bar was opened by his mother June Brehm in 1968, who owned it and maintained a presence for most of her life. While not opened as a “gay bar,” the bar was friendly to all customers, and became a mecca for gay men when another nearby gay bar closed.

Over the years, Joe kept the bar exciting, and maintained a loyal following of old-timers as well as always attracting new blood. For most of the bar’s life known as an LGBT bar, the bar continued to be busy on evenings when other bars’ business lagged, in part because it was the only gay bar in the immediate downtown area (and thus easy for visitors staying in downtown hotels to get to) but also because of Joe’s presence and warmth with all his customers. Joe recognized the LGBT community was his main source of business, but he always kept an open door and welcomed the community at large, which made his bar popular to the general business community in the surrounding area as well.

Joe was also very community aware and a true activist. He was close friends with the owners of the *Wisconsin Light* newspaper, helping them computerize and use new technology for typesetting, layout, email, etc. Joe was also often the first in line to support community causes, hosting fundraising events for the Cream City Foundation, AIDS, and other worthy causes. He and ‘This Is It’ were a major sponsor of the PrideFest History Exhibit each year during his life.

Joe’s mother, June, passed away early in 2010, after which Joe controlled ownership of the bar. He continued to maintain a daily presence in managing the bar, and could be found in the bar early each day—until a diagnosis of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a progressive neurodegenerative disease, began to restrict his mobility.

Late in 2015, Joe’s health went into decline. In mid-March 2016, Joe received a letter from U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin recognizing his and his mother’s vision and dedication. Then, March 31, 2016 was proclaimed “Joe Brehm Day” by Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett.

Joe passed away peacefully late in the afternoon on Sunday, April 3, 2016. He is survived by his wife of 47 years, two daughters, and other family. A Celebration of Life was held at ‘This Is It’ bar on Sunday, April 10, and hundreds of customers, plus friends and family, attended to share memories of Joe.