

pub-lics

Winning the loyalty of locals has become more important than ever during the downturn.

Over the next four pages we look at two pubs that go the extra mile to be at the hearts of their communities.



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Retailers Lynne and Mike Ryan have put the Woodman on the map by working with local businesses and groups to provide crucial services and competition-beating offers.

Their 'evergreen menu' – pensioner specials that include a bowl of soup and a roll for just 10p, a salad for 50p and a Sunday roast for 99p – has won praise as part of the local newspaper's Good Neighbour campaign.

Unsurprisingly, the bargain meals are a big success. The soup, which ordinarily would retail at £2.95, is made from fresh vegetables leftover from Sunday's roasts.

"Pensioners are probably suffering more than most with the credit crunch. We thought it would be ideal to encourage older people to come in, sit in the warm and have a chat with us and the locals," said Lynne.

"We're able to offer this so cheaply because we allow our veg man to set up his stall in our car-park in exchange for free vegetables for our Sunday lunches. And we recommend the local butcher to our customers, and he gives us cheaper meat. It means we can put a steak on our evergreen menu."

The pub boosts food trade further by selling takeaway fish and chips at £2.95, undercutting the local chip shop.

What's more, adds Lynne, people will buy a drink while they wait.

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Food promotions are not the only mutually beneficial deal. "We have a public bar that we can't afford to staff alongside the main one so we let it out to groups for free, and they buy drinks and meals."

The room accommodates a diverse cross-section of the community: Hampshire County Council carers, Normandy war vets, and the local football team have all benefited from the facility, as well as discounted meals and free buffets as part of the package.

It's also used to run a free 'surgery' where customers bring in their electrical appliances to be fixed. Plus the local band gets use out of it – they get a space in which to practice in return for a couple of free gigs for the pub.

Promote

It's an approach that not only supports customers, but also makes good business sense. Other initiatives include a regular book sale in the car park – the organisers pay their thanks by handing out leaflets promoting the pub – while a bookstall in the corner of the bar encourages people to pop in and buy a drink while they browse.

And thanks to a public bottle bank onsite, there is one less bin to pay for.

"The community is keeping us alive," admitted Lynne. "Loads of pubs in area have shut and we want to be one of the few that are still going. Customers have decreased or sadly died off over the last two years, and the smoking ban and rising taxes have affected trade, so we've really had to turn the pub to different ways of making money."

keywins

Pensioner specials – cut-price meals give the elderly an incentive to visit

Takeaway – fish and chips cheaper than local chip-shop prices

Veg markets and book sales – supporting local businesses while providing services for the community

Public bar – has proven invaluable in catering for local groups

The Woodman, Lordshill, Southampton

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Earl Ferrers, Streatham, South London

The Earl Ferrers was a mere shadow of a pub until a year ago, when Duncan Love grabbed the opportunity to turn it into a thriving focal point for local residents.

“I looked at its potential and how much people wanted a local pub that they could use as a hub of the community,” he explained.

After some material improvements, which included installing a kitchen, repaving the outdoor area and generally making the pub more family-friendly, Duncan began building trade. Offering the pub as a venue for committee meetings proved an effective route to getting local residents on board.

“When I took it on the residents were in midst of planning a street party so I got the pub involved by organising the music and a BBQ,” he said.

Book club

Since then, the pub’s social calendar has grown rapidly. The ‘locals night’ every Tuesday has become particularly popular, hosting everything from a book club and a film club to a knitting group.

“It encourages customers into the pub on a quiet night and also brings people together. For example, no-one in the book club knew each other, now they’re all friends. And we have something called Stitch ‘n’ Bitch one Tuesday every month, where people come along with their knitting and sewing and have a good natter,”



said the retailer, who never tires of introduced innovative ways of making the pub a real home-from-home.

On Monday night customers are invited to bring along their iPods to play, a quiz keeps the pub full on Wednesdays, and on Sundays drinkers are treated to intimate gigs from big names on the music circuit, such as Gwyneth Herbert and Amy Winehouse’s backing singer, Ade Omotayo.

Local cask-ales also play their part in boosting trade, and brews like Sambrooks from Battersea – which Duncan sources through the SIBA scheme – are becoming firm favourites of the ‘boys’ beer club’.

Even something as simple as the notice board has become an integral part of the pub. It’s constantly updated with the latest events and is always in use, advertising local businesses, yoga classes, missing pet notices. It also serves as a showcase for artwork produced by local children.

The key to success, says Duncan, is keeping your finger on the pulse.

“In Streatham there’s nothing like what we offer; all the places on the High Street have been turned into style bars and are all quite pricey. We’re residential and people wouldn’t know where it is unless they had a reason to walk past it.”

And now they do.

keywins

Quirky clubs – combining home comforts and local interests e.g. film club includes free popcorn, sofas and blankets

Noticeboard – the pub is a base for local business and social networking

Street parties and festivals – involvement in local events keeps the pub at the centre of the celebrations

Local beers – four hand-pumps constantly provide a local flavour, with ales sourced via SIBA

Roast dinners – a winner with locals on Sundays, when the 40-seater pub caters for about 60 covers

twice

Continued



LOCALS NIGHT: Retailer Duncan Love's book club is bringing in local trade on a regular basis



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