

How The Arizona Pipe Club Was Founded.

By Charles Atkins

In The Fall of 2014, a thread was started on Pipesmagazine forums about if there was a pipe club in the greater Phoenix area. Three of us decided to meet at a cigar lounge, me and one other guy and his wife, and we had a great time. We posted about the meeting on the forum, and two guys from Tucson made the trip for the next month's meeting and it stayed that way for quite some time. A few others joined us from the PM Forum, and came for a while and dropped off.

The club stayed that way for quite a few years, and we met at a Tinderbox store that went through a change in owners, it showed promise as a place to meet, but shortly thereafter the second owner defaulted and the place was shuttered...that was sad as the manager showed an interest in growing the pipe side, he even invited Laudisi for a trunk show!

We relocated to a cigar centric shop where we knew the proprietor had decades managing another Tinderbox until it closed and opened his own cigar centric shop...he still had bulk offerings and a few options for the pipe smoker, but the cigar smokers payed the rent. We approached him letting him know that we would like a place to meet and help him build up the pipe side of his business, by buying from him as opposed to just purchasing online.

Engaging with social media by constructing a Facebook page and building a website has helped us triple our attendance...as much as I do not like Facebook, it has been invaluable in making connections, and a website gives legitimacy...we recently acquired a logo thanks to "Jiminks" who is Jim Amash, a notable tobacco reviewer and Artist that put us into contact with a person to help us out. Make sure you update the sites in a timely fashion, or you will hear about it...to be fair, timely updates help with legitimacy. If someone word searches "pipe club arizona" they will come to us quickly!

Regrets, and advice:

Try to avoid politics....if some members break off into quiet side discussions on politics, fine but do not make it a theme of the pipe club...politics seem to dominate so much of society, and a pipe club meeting is a nice respite from it all...do not rob yourself of a great time, or alienating others.

At our first venue when the proprietor had a trunk show, one attendee commented loudly at the price of a Savinelli saying that it was cheaper online at "Brand X online merchant"...*the online merchant did not pay for air conditioning and a comfortable place to smoke...that was embarrassing.*

That leads into not being clearer at the inception that we need to be cognizant of the fact that a brick and mortar shop does not need people bringing in tons of tobaccos and pipes that are unavailable in his shop to dump on the tables and conduct a swap meet in the air conditioned comfort that he is footing the bill for. There needs to be an understanding between the pipe club members about what is acceptable and what is not...different venues call for different protocols, if a pipe club meets in a cigar shop that has no desire to stock pipe related products, they may be fine with selling the members drinks. It is important to use discernment in this area, one person takes the lead and has conversations with the proprietor, and communicates to the rest of the club on what is acceptable.

Pick a day of the month and stick rigorously to it...if only two show up, so be it. We arbitrarily picked the second Saturday of every month and so far, we have never had a conflict with holidays. The cigar lounge has a pipe night, but it is not a pipe club event, we promote it...many show up and we have made connections with new people that do not have weekends off.

Face it folks...the trajectory of the anti-tobacco laws are such that with the FD deeming regulations, I can see a day in the near future where online sales are no longer an option. We are already seeing an increasing tendency of states taxing pipe tobacco shipments that online retailers are forced to comply with, that will have an effect on the current disparity between online versus brick and mortar going forward.... It is in your best interest to generate a relationship with a local tobacconist, so when that day comes, companies like Arango cigar that has blends like Esoterica and Gawith will have a place to sell their goods. If tomorrow the FDA stopped online sales, it would be much better to have the foundation laid.

Survey the members about what tobacco's and pipes that they want and pass it on to the tobacconist...if he is not a pipe smoker, he might buy cases of Captain Black and wonder why the pipe smokers aren't buying the most recognizable blend on the planet....and when he does buy the good stuff, buy it from him.

Some clubs charge dues, has fund raisers, and has formal meetings calling it to order and that all works great, if you want to keep it informal like we do that is great also, find what works for your group.

If a person attends the pipe meetings and seems like they are on fire about the club, but later fizzle out, do not spend too much time analyzing it...reach out to them in an email, but don't let it bother you...interests come and go, and wane...if all our past attendees showed up on a given night, we would have fifty in attendance...we average fifteen...And an email distribution list is good to update everyone, we have several that have not attended in quite a while, but they know the option to unsubscribe is there.

Keep calm, and smoke on!
Charlie Atkins
Arizona Pipe Club