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Are there cocktails in Claremont’s future?

May 30 vote has backers and foes

By HANNAH MITCHELL

CLAREMONT — Iced tea is most people's beverage of choice in this eastern Catawba County town of about 1,000.

But the sweet, golden drink could soon have a rival here.

On May 30, Claremont will decide whether to allow the sale of mixed drinks, something three other Catawba towns approved years ago.

The county seat of Newton, with its 1990 vote, was the most recent; Hickory and Conover approved mixed-drink sales in 1980.

Claremont, perched on Interstate 40 and split down the middle by U.S. 70, is growing. Its population jumped a projected 7.4 percent between 1990 and 1998.

With a business park on the edge of town boasting big-name industries like telecommunications giant Alcatel, Owens Corning and Gulf States Paper, more people are moving here to enjoy high-paying jobs, blooming azaleas and friendly faces.

Some of the newcomers, along with some Claremont natives, say a dab of liquor once in a while would be a nice addition to the scene.

"There would be more business if we had mixed-drink sales in restaurants," said Gale Crater, a production supervisor at coaxial cable maker CommScope. "There would be more tax dollars for the school system."

Jeff Bolick, who just opened the new Boxcar Grille in town, started the push for mixed-drink sales by asking the Town Council to request the referendum.

CAST YOUR VOTE

- Claremont's mixed beverages referendum will be May 30. The voting place at Claremont Elementary School will be open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- The deadline to register for the election is 5 p.m. May 5.
- Voter registration forms are at Claremont City Hall, the County Government Center in Newton and county public libraries.
- One-stop absentee voting begins May 8 and ends May 26.
- For more information, call the county Board of Elections at (828) 464-2424.
- People will vote for or against: Permitting the sale of mixed beverages in hotels, restaurants, private clubs, community theaters and convention centers.
Backers tout growth; opponents foresee harm

asking Claremont’s Town Council to request the referendum.

“With the international community, it’s an accepted thing to have a drink with your meal,” he said on a break at the railroad-themed restaurant. He referred to the executives at companies like Alcatel who move to Claremont from other countries or host customers visiting from overseas.

Liquor sales might ruin that peace, Richards said.

“Any time you expose someone to something, there’s a chance they’re going to pick that up,” Richards said, though he realizes people can drive down the road to Conover or Hickory for a drink. “If you have to walk past a bar with your kids, they’re going to ask you, ‘What’s that?’ ”

P.J. Stanley was the only Claremont Town Council member who voted against the referendum. A part-time police officer in Claremont, he said the crime rate rose when a sports bar opened there a few years ago. He thinks mixed-drink sales would cause the same trend.

“Claremont’s going to grow anyway,” Stanley said. “We’re dedicated to controlled growth; we don’t want just anything.”

Mayor Glenn Morrison, though, said Claremont could use an extra boost to development.

“We have about 6,000 people who drive into Claremont every day and work,” said Morrison, who said he doesn’t drink alcohol.

“We’re behind the times,” said Claremont resident Robert Clongringer.

So far, the Boxcar Grille is the only Claremont restaurant to request mixed-drink sales, but Town Council members expect more eating places to open and the demand to increase.

Bolick said he realizes some families might not want to be exposed to drinking, so he separated the Grille’s bar, which sells beer and wine, from the rest of the restaurant. “You don’t even know it’s here.”
Claremont chooses sides over vote on mixed drinks

By HANNAH MITCHELL
Staff Writer

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On May 30, Claremont will decide whether to allow the sale of mixed drinks.

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“There would be more business if we had mixed-drink sales in restaurants,” said Gale Crater, a production supervisor at coaxial cable maker CommScope.

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But not everyone agrees liquor would be good for Claremont. First Baptist Church is trying to defeat the idea by registering voters and conducting a mail campaign.

The Rev. Dennis Richards of First Baptist said mixed-drink sales would harm Claremont, particularly its children.

“I’ve seen families hurt because of abuse,” Richards said. “I’ve seen families that have lost family members from drunk drivers.”
First Baptist holds revival services

The First Baptist Church of Claremont will be holding revival services from Sunday, Oct. 13 through Wednesday, Oct. 16. These services will begin at 7 p.m. each night.

Rev. Tommy Stephens of Christ United Baptist Church in Hickory will be the guest speaker.

The public is invited to attend. Rev. Dennis J. Richards, Sr. is the pastor.