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Vancouver restaurants, bars gear up for Canucks season

Hiring on the rise as bars anticipate a doubling of revenues on game nights

BY BRIAN MORTON, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 3, 2011

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Chris Hannan, manager at the Charles Bar in Gastown, which is a 10-minute walk from Rogers Arena. The bar is hiring extra staff to prepare for the new season.

Photograph by: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

It's that time of year again and downtown Vancouver's bars and restaurants are anticipating a brand new hockey-season-long run on their cash registers.

With the Vancouver Canucks slated to open their regular season Thursday against the Pittsburgh Penguins, local businesses are gearing up for the inevitable rush of fans who like nothing better than a good meal and several beers served up with their favourite team.

They're also hoping that last season's exciting playoff run will translate into a lot of new regulars.

The latest big screen TVs, an array of comfy couches and décor suited to walk-in patrons, plus updated menus geared to sports fans of every persuasion, are some of the ways Vancouver's pubs and restaurants will try to entice customers.

"It equates to about a 50-per-cent increase in sales, for both food and booze, on game night," said Chris Hannan, general manager of Charles Bar in Gastown. "A \$3,000 night could go to a \$4,500 night. We go from half-full to full-full."

Hannan, whose sports bar/lounge is a 10-minute walk from Rogers

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Arena, believes business will be up considerably this year because of the Canucks' playoff run last season.

"Over the past month, we've hired four or five more people."

Ian Tostenson, president and CEO of the B.C. Restaurant and Foodservices Association, believes there will be a "heightened sense of interest" this year as bars and restaurants cash in on Canuck fever.

"Sales will probably be up 10 to 15 per cent [on average] on a hockey night as against a non-hockey night. But sales in the playoffs could double.

"It's very good for the hospitality industry in every single way."

However, Tostenson said the real benefits will happen during the second half of the season, when – if – the Canucks take another solid run at the Stanley Cup.

"It [Canuck fever] will build. It won't be next week when everybody lines up. That happens when they're clearly in playoff contention."

Tostenson noted that the Stanley Cup riot has resulted in a greater awareness about the potential for things to get out of hand, and that most bars understand the need for a co-ordinated effort from everyone to ensure a riot doesn't reoccur.

Mark Roberts is the owner of Luke's Corner Bar and Kitchen, which recently opened at 14th and Granville, and part-owner of the Kingston Taphouse and Grill at Richards and Georgia in downtown Vancouver.

While both establishments are geared to a restaurant crowd, they also cater to sports fans on hockey nights.

"A big part of the increased sales [at Luke's] will be sports in general, but the Canucks drive that the most," Roberts said, adding that the Kingston is "filled up every game."

"It's neighbourhood focused," he added of Luke's. "We've added more TVs and we're letting our staff get dressed up in Canucks clothing during games."

He estimates that business increases 100 per cent on weekday game nights — 50 per cent on weekends — and credits Canucks games with increasing his overall revenues by up to \$800,000 per season.

As to any after-effects from the riot, Roberts said he won't do anything differently this year because his patrons didn't cause any trouble.

"If there was a good suggestion to allow us to help, sure," added Roberts about the hospitality industry's role in preventing a rerun of the riot.

"But people sought refuge in the Kingston," he said.

"We locked the doors and kept them safe."

It's not just restaurants and bars anxiously awaiting the drop of the puck — sports memorabilia companies see the hockey season as their most lucrative time of year.

"The start of the hockey season is the start of the season for us as well," said Darrell Lidstone, part-owner of Vancouver's Touchstone Sports.

Lidstone, whose company, among other things, produces custom-framed sports collectibles including signed hockey jerseys, said up to 40 per cent of his business is during the hockey season.

Some framed, autographed jerseys can sell for \$1,000, he said.

Touchstone's top seller? "Anything with Ryan Kesler is big, far outselling



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