

# **With the Rise of Dating Apps and A Growing Tolerance, Only Two Gay Bars Still Stand**

By: Khadijah Williams

COLUMBIA, Mo.- The music plays over the conversations from regular customers sitting on bar stools in front of Pitt Potter, the owner of Arch & Column Pub, as he makes their drinks.

For more than 10 years, the pub at 1301 Business Loop 70 E., welcomes members of the LGBTQ community and others in an environment that values free expression. Dating apps are taking the place of meeting new people across the world compared to the pub offering a physical site to meet in the community. Potter stated a decline in business compared to the past when gay bars were the only location that allowed entry for members of the LGBTQ community. The internet brought a new way of communication that was quick and accessible with smartphones.

Social dating apps such as Grindr and Her make it easier to find like-minded people without the need for a physical space. In two reports from 2018, [Grindr](#) and [Her](#) each have 3 million active users which individuals can view the profiles of interested participants. A large network of potential partners is convenient because of its 24/7 availability, just one click on smartphones offers the benefit of saving time and money.

“People are lazy. I don’t want to go out to a gay bar every night after I worked when I can lie in bed and get on Grindr,” said Damon Sprouse, a user on Grindr.

Before social dating apps, people wanted a secluded location to meet individuals as many didn't tolerate the LGBTQ community and, in some states, was illegal because of sodomy laws across the country.

"They don't have to go to the bar and meet people when they can do it on their phones. Social media were a decline of those kinds of bars," said Marty Newman, owner of the former SoCo club.

When establishments didn't provide safety for LGBTQ members, gay bars were the place that many could be free to express themselves and avoid discrimination. Potter wants the pub to act as a place that provides freedom of discussion in a safe environment.

"If you're happy, then I'm happy," Potter said.

According to an article by the [Columbia Missourian](#), gay bars would open and close throughout the last decade such as Styx, Three Cheers and the SoCo Club. After Three Cheers closed in 2002, Potter and members of the LGBTQ community took over the site and helped set up what is now the Arch & Column Pub.

"The community came in to clean up the place, and when we needed a permit signed, somebody knew somebody, and we met all the requirements through our own little network," Potter said.

Over time, people have become more tolerant of sexuality and social individuality, including other straight bars in Columbia. According to a [report](#) by the Movement Advancement Project, members of the LGBTQ community make up 3 percent of the population in Missouri. More straight bars are becoming LGBTQ inclusive that patrons will have a wide selection of bars to visit, which wouldn't exclude LGBTQ members because of their sexuality or social identity.

“It started out as a close-knit community. Over the years, the acceptance outside of our own little spaces is increasing as it is becoming more of a non-issue for gay people to go out and enjoy other clubs,” Potter said.

The Yin Yang Night Club is another place for members of the LGBTQ community that host drag shows, burlesque shows and other social events, before taking the place of the SoCo club that invited a variety of subculture groups as a nonexclusive location.

“We had a steampunk crowd, a group of swingers who did role-playing and the public which enjoyed the show,” Newman said.

Straight people tend to visit regular bars instead of gay bars for its familiarity is common to see more media representation of a straight bar.

“It's more familiar to what you think of stereotypically going out on the town,” said Emma Francois, a student at Truman State University.

The shows involving female impersonation and a theme party like a 70s prom offered at gay bars can entice the public to visit their establishment.

A community found the location before the Arch & Column Pub opened and assisted with re-establishing the pub to preserve the history of gay bars as a pivotal foundation for the LGBTQ rights. The locals continue to visit the pub as the establishment is a part of the community itself.

“It has always been the community that has kept it opened. It belongs to the community,” Potter said.