

HEALTHY LIVING

A home away from home

Social sanctuaries fill an emotional need during economic stress

BY RHONDA COOK & MICHAEL E. KANELL
Cox News Service

Tim Yanaetsko and Ontorio Dubose were hanging around Marietta Billiard Club, not drinking anything, not eating anything and not shooting pool.

They were waiting to play poker.

In the dim, scattered light of the late afternoon, they were connected to a place and the people in it, linked by their anticipation, as well as by talk, by familiarity and by the threads of a stressed economy.

"I'm just trying to get by, trying to survive," Yanaetsko said.

Places like the pool hall have been around for a long time, of course, but as the job market unravels, more people reach for a "third place" — neither home nor work, but a substitute with some of the best attributes of each.

"One of the major reasons that people



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As more people lose their jobs or worry about that possibility, "third places" like Marietta Billiard Club in Marietta, Ga. (above), take on a more meaningful role as a temporary escape and place to soak up the support of friends.



Max Manor of Acworth, Ga., lines up a shot at Marietta Billiard Club, a place where players and nonplayers can spend hours among friends.

go is just to hang out with other people," said Ray Oldenburg, best known for writing "The Great Good Place," a look at such sanctuaries. "There are dozens of functions of third places, but what it comes down to is not being alone," Oldenburg said.

Some "third places" are obvious: libraries, beer gardens, pubs and coffeehouses. Some are less so: post offices and barber shops, for example. These places can bring people together across class and race lines. They offer a kind of social democracy, albeit one that often has a hierarchy of regulars and outsiders. Most important, with minimal admission fees, they are communities.

During economic stress, the need for a haven is even more urgent, said Oldenburg, a professor at the University of West Florida in Pensacola, Fla. "I think it makes this more important. If you are down and out, to hang around with friends helps."

This weekday afternoon, the smoke in the room is thick. Neon beer signs line the walls, and five flat-screen televisions play behind the bar.

Only nine pool tables — less than one-third — are taken. At some, only one person is shooting pool.

There are a lot of potential players these days: roughly 11.6 million Americans are officially out of work. Yanaetsko was laid off nine months ago from his job making signs for a real estate business.

His car was repossessed, so his family depends on public transportation. They go to food banks. They also took in a boarder.

Dubose lost his \$2,000-per-month job driving a truck three months ago.

He gets no unemployment benefits, picking up odd jobs to support himself

and his four daughters while he chases leads for permanent work. "It's rough out there. You can call the staffing services and they say they aren't hiring."

He pays rent "by the skin of my teeth."

But the pool hall charges no rent. You can hang out for hours, chat or watch television or just sit and gaze into space until the poker starts up.

And if you pay for lunch, you can play pool for no charge until 3 in the afternoon.

Harold Dorden comes to the pool hall three or four times a week, now that he's closed his construction business. The recession forced him to shut down. He and his wife are living off the salary she earns at a collection agency.

The pool hall is "an outlet," he said. "It relieves stress." ■

U.S. residents 'fattest in history,' report declares

BY DIANNA SMITH
Cox News Service

A Florida Atlantic University researcher is calling the United States the fattest society in the world.

After taking part in a worldwide study that spanned an estimated 40 years, Dr. Charles Hennekens said the results show that Americans are increasingly unhealthy.

"We're likely to be the fattest in the history of the world," Hennekens said. "Unless Americans lose weight and increase physical activity, cardiovascular disease will remain the leading killer."

Hennekens is the first Sir Richard Doll research professor at FAU. Doll, who died in 2005, was the premier epidemiologist of the 20th century.

The Lancet, an international medical journal, recently posted the results of the study. Body mass index numbers were gathered from 900,000 adults in a total of 57 studies.



Body mass index helps estimate a healthy body weight based on how tall a person is. According to the study, the optimal BMI is 22-25, but two-thirds of Americans are above 25 and one-third is above 30. A person with a BMI above 30 reduces their life span by 2-4 years and life spans are reduced 8-10 years for those 35 and higher.

Hennekens said he is particularly worried about the children.

"Young people today are heavier," Hennekens said. "The youngsters will be the first generation in the last 50 years to have a higher mortality rate than their parents."

Dr. Edward Mostel, a cardiologist in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., and spokesman for the American Heart Association Palm Beach County Chapter, said nearly 1 in 3 children are overweight nationwide. Lack of exercise and eating oversized portions of unhealthy food are to blame, he said. ■

Study confirms: Reduce calories to lose weight

BY CHRIS ROSENBLUM
Cox News Service

Diets are always a hot topic, so the recent New England Journal of Medicine study on varying levels of carbohydrates, protein and fat for weight loss got a lot of media attention. We've gone from Atkins (high fat, low carbohydrates) to Ornish (low fat, high carbohydrates), yet everyone wants to know the "best" diet for weight loss. Based on the more than 800 overweight adults who participated in the study for two years, here are the take-home lessons for those of you who want to shed a few pounds before summer swimsuit season.

Lesson 1 > People can lose weight if calorie intake is reduced — there is nothing magical about the percent of carbohydrates, protein or fat that you eat. Less food (no matter if it comes from bread, roast beef or olive oil) will lead to weight loss.

Lesson 2 > You may think you are following a low-fat or a high-protein diet, but after about six months, you won't be meeting the targets for fat, protein or carbohydrates. Dieters have a hard time sticking to a rigid prescription, but that is OK. As long as you continue to reduce calories, you will lose weight.

Lesson 3 > You don't have to be skinny to improve your health. In the weight-loss study, participants lost about

13 pounds or 7 percent of their weight in six months. That might not sound like a lot of weight, but even a small loss can improve your blood cholesterol levels, increase the "good" cholesterol and decrease the "bad" cholesterol. Losing 10 pounds can also lower your blood pressure and improve blood sugar levels.

Lesson 4 > Get connected. Successful losers attended group sessions; the more sessions they attended, the more weight they lost. Enlist the support of your family and friends to help you stay motivated to lose weight and to keep it off. Talk to your doctor about weight loss if he or she doesn't bring it up, and check whether your health plan covers visits to a registered dietitian.

Lesson 5 > Expect some weight regain. Dieters started gaining after the initial weight loss and ended up losing about nine pounds at the end of two years. Every dieter knows this challenge. The best strategy to fight the pounds is constant vigilance. Weigh yourself every day and monitor how your favorite jeans fit — when the pants get snug, it is time to redouble your efforts.

Lesson 6 > There is no magic food that will stop hunger. All the dieters reported feeling satisfied with the plan they were assigned to and there were no differences in hunger or fullness among the groups. ■