

# Nightwatch: Mix holiday cheer with ice-cold beer

by Tom Horgen  
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Some bars are like hospitals. They never close. (Actually, bars are probably one reason why hospitals never close.) But if there's one day out of the year that your favorite watering hole does shut its doors, it's probably Christmas Eve. Most bars -- even hard-core dives such as the Turf Club -- take that night off. But a few don't.

For many people, spending Christmas Eve on a bar stool conjures up images of lonely hearts and beer-drenched sorrow. But that's not always the case. We found a few spots that promote smiles on the night before Christmas.

At the state's oldest bar, happy days are here again.

Neumann's Bar in North St. Paul is famous for being Minnesota's oldest bar (est. 1887). People don't drink here; generations do.

So you know holidays in the old-time saloon are treated a bit differently.

"We don't really have Christmas depression. It's kind of weird," said Frank Kohler, the joint's longtime bartender. "Everybody's pretty happy."

Neumann's is a place where families and friends get together on the holidays. It's often the first place people who've moved away will come back to, looking for familiar faces on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. "It's a ritual now," Kohler said.

Of course, one of the most recognizable faces is Kohler's. The 53-year-old bartender, who looks a bit like Elton John with his spiked bleached hair and orange-rimmed glasses (although he's built more like a linebacker than a pop star), gets some extra-special loving from his regulars during Christmas time, in the form of tips. He once got a \$100 tip for a Hamm's beer.

"You know when the mailman comes by during Christmas and some people give him an extra envelope? I'm kind of like that here," he said.