



While this nearly-legendary bar in Lister Hall might have been dry-docked years ago, its memory has remained stark in the minds of those that visited it. Now, with a new renovation and a new purpose, wind has once again filled the sails of the Ship.

**“The picture I have in my head is, you know in the movie the *Shining*, when [the main character] is standing in the hallway and all of that blood is rushing down the hallway. It’s almost like that, where students were flying down the hallway to get into the Ship.”**

Jordan Blatz,  
former LHSA president

The opening of a new study lounge in Lister Hall hopes to rekindle new interest in a space that has become a major part of the residence’s history.

“KISS actually played their first Canadian concert over there,” said Michael Janz, President of the Lister Hall Students’ Association (LHSA), pointing to the Ship’s dance floor where students were crowded around a cake with an anchor painted on it in grey icing.

“If I remember correctly, they ended the concert half an hour early, and Lister residents gave them very poor reviews,” he added with a laugh.

Being host to the osculating glam-rockers from New York may be just one of the many salty stories that make up the history of the Ship, Lister’s once-infamous bar, but it certainly does seem to be one of the favourites. In fact, that tidbit was told at least three times on Friday, which saw the grand reopening of the newly renovated area as a lounge, designed to provide a place for students to gather and unwind from the rigors of classes and dorm life. While the calm game of billiards near the door and the quiet studying in the corner might seem a stark contrast to the rowdy, dingy bar that occupied the space years ago, those with fond memories of the old Ship see them as similar in one important respect: both give Listerites a place to gather together and meet people within the building.

To hear some tell it, the history of Lister can’t be told without mentioning the Ship. Part of Lister Hall since the residence’s opening in 1963, the bar was built during a time when in-house clubs and bars were common for residences. In keeping with the nautical theme of Lister Hall, the establishment was dubbed the Ship, and its interior was designed to resemble the inside of a sea-faring vessel, complete with wooden tables that invited patrons to carve their marks into while enjoying a pint.

“We’ve got the Marina [Lister’s cafeteria] and the Lighthouse [the resident

newsletter], and so we’ve got the Ship,” explained Janelle Morin, LHSA Vice-President (Public Relations). “I have no idea why, really. We’re about as far from water as you can get.”

The Ship soon became a staple of life in Lister Hall. Thursdays, the first night that the establishment would sell liquor, would see especially large crowds of Lister students eager to get an early start on the weekend. Thursdays were often themed, encouraging students to dress up in costumes ranging from pirate regalia to Greek togas. Red Light, Green Light nights were especially popular, with every student displaying a piece of coloured paper to clearly advertise their romantic (or sexual) availability.

“You’d come in on Thursday afternoon and the lineup of people would be from the doors of the Ship out to the mailboxes. There would be a few hundred people all lined up, because if you didn’t get in early, you wouldn’t get in,” said Miki Abe, who remembers the Ship from her first year living in residence. “It was the one thing that everybody looked forward to over the whole week: it’s Thursday night, time to go to the Ship.”

Jordan Blatz, who was president of the LHSA at the time of the establishment’s closing, also has vivid memories of people rushing down to line up for their chance to get into the Ship.

“The picture I have in my head is, you know in the movie the *Shining*, when [the main character] is standing in the hallway and all of that blood is rushing down the hallway. It’s almost like that, where students were flying down the hallway to get into the Ship.”

The bar remained popular with residents, both as a spot to spend their evenings and as an employer, which is why there was so much surprise when word came in 2003 that the Ship would no longer continue to operate as a bar. Blatz recalls the shock that the organization learned about the news shortly before the beginning of the fall semester.

“Every year, the [LHSA] executive got together with the [University’s] Housing administration and just talked about the expectations for the upcoming year. When we got into that meeting, Housing had a huge bombshell for us. They didn’t believe that it was proper for a residence to have an alcoholic establishment operating out of it and that there were insurance issues,” Blatz said.

The Administration told the LHSA that the U of A’s insurance provider, which covered campus bars nationwide, would no longer insure the Ship if it continued to serve drinks. According to Blatz, Housing and Food Services (now Ancillary Services) opted to close down the establishment

completely, citing concerns about damage done to the property as well as an increase in sexual assaults in the residence hall.

“We received a sexual assault survey results from two years ago, and they linked the alcohol and the service of alcohol in Lister as being one of the main contributions to the sexual assaults that occur in Lister,” Tracey Mason, the Assistant Director of Residence Life, told the Gateway in 2003.

The LHSA looked for other insurance options and eventually asked the Students’ Union to insure the establishment—the SU, however, was already covering RATT and the Powerplant, and couldn’t afford to cover the liability on another bar. Finally, the decision was made to simply close the Ship down.

However, the LHSA negotiated an extension before scuttling the Ship, asking the business to remain open until the end of the current insurance agreement, originally thought to conclude in January 2004. It was later learned that the contract was misread, and that the Ship’s insurance wouldn’t be able to expire until the following year. That allowed the business to keep its doors open until the end of April.

“We had told housing that we wanted the Ship to stay aloft on its own terms. We would be in responsible for running it responsibly, and we would sink it on our own terms because it was some thing that students found so special.”

The extra time gave first-year students an opportunity to experience the Ship before it went under, and helped ease the loss felt by returning students.

“It was really sad when the place finally closed,” Abe said. “I remember when I first got to Lister, all of the second-years said, ‘As soon as you’re 18, we’re going to take you to the Ship for your birthday.’ So, when it closed down, I was sad that we weren’t going to be able to do that for the new people coming in.”

“It was just a great place to gather. You could go down and meet other people from other floors. Everyone was always dressed up for the theme nights and together on the dance floor. It was a place where you could go and not feel intimidated, to meet people who were in the same situation as you,” she added.

Although the physical bar had sunk, Lister’s executive attempted to keep the spirit of the place alive. A deal brokered with the Powerplant set every second Thursday as “Ship Night.” While open to anyone, the event is geared towards continuing the Lister bar’s tradition of theme parties and drink specials. Nathan Brown, who manages the biweekly event, said that while not as popular as the original,

the transplanted Ship Night draws in significant numbers.

“On our busiest nights, we’ve had about 400 people, and around 100 on our slower ones,” Brown said.

“People still go all out for the theme nights, spend a lot of time on the costumes. It’s a great time to just gather and have fun with people. It’s also safer than going out to Whyte Avenue or another one of the bars in the city, and then having to walk back to campus.”

When the Ship closed down as a bar, the space remained open for students to gather or study. However, the dingy surroundings and dim lighting didn’t seem much of a draw for students. While there were plans to renovate the space to make it more appealing to Listerites, financial roadblocks made this difficult. Instead, the space sat empty and mostly unchanged until 2006, when Ancillary Services and the LHSA struck a deal to turn the space into a study space and lounge for the residents of the towers. Although the renovations were mostly done in the fall, the official grand reopening and ribbon cutting for the newly designed ship didn’t occur until Friday.

David Bruch, Executive Director of Ancillary Services, was one of the ribbon cutters, along with Michael Janz. Bruch said that while the interior of the Ship might have changed, students opted to keep one part of the room’s history alive along with the new incarnation.

“We gave students the chance to name the new space, and they voted to keep it the same, to keep the name the Ship,” he said. “The full name of the space is the Ship Community Centre, and that’s what it is designed for, for students to be able to gather.”

Blatz agreed that, while it won’t be the same as when the Ship was still operating as a bar, the main draw of the place was the chance to mingle with other Listerites and to forge friendships with those on other floors and in other towers.

“It wasn’t anything overly special in terms of the look of the place. If you walked in there on a Saturday afternoon, it didn’t look like the kind of place that was as popular as it was. It had old furniture. The carpet was really nasty ... it wasn’t much to look at. It was all the people who gathered there, mostly on Thursday nights, it was a chance for you ... without leaving your building to go have fun with other people living there.”

And yes, like the others who remember the Ship, Blatz does remember the near-legend of when KISS boarded the Ship.

“They played a sold out show. If memory serves me correct ... [the concert committee] had KISS play and it ended up that they lost something like \$5 on the whole night.”