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Behold the Forty

A paean to the big bad bottle

By Mike Seely

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Thanks to crafty municipal orders and public flogging, the Forty has given way to tall cans -- and Cognac -- up in the 'hood.

Jennifer Silverberg



Collinsville liquor store clerk Chris Zaganelli bags one for Pedalin' Ken.



"S-T-Crooked-I-D-E-S: Guaranteed to get a big booty undressed": Ice Cube

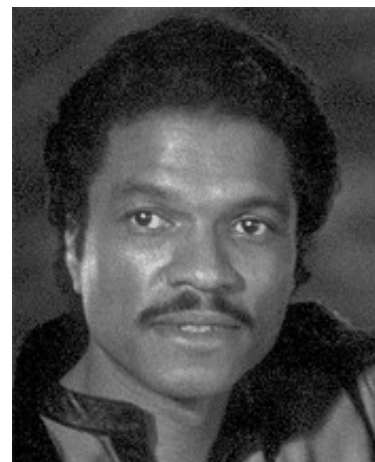
Jennifer Silverberg



Comedian Robin Thompson believes the hyperbolic demonization of Forties and malt liquor "did the crack epidemic a disservice."



The face of post-civil rights
Colt .45: Redd Foxx



Colt .45 "works every time":
Billy Dee Williams

Jennifer Silverberg



When Josh Alt learned it was actually legal to sell cold Forties at his Tin Can Tavern & Grille, he jumped at the opportunity.



New Jersey-based "40-Ounce Crew" chief and big bad bottle collector Pete "Bruz" Brusyo tips a Forty to its memory.

Each day, Kenny rides his bicycle to Dean's Spirits & Sundries in downtown Collinsville and purchases six bottles of Milwaukee's Best beer. He does not buy them all at once in traditional six-pack form, but rather individually, ferrying one bottle roughly every two hours to the cashier's counter on his way out the door.

"He straps them to the back of his bike and off he goes," says Dean's attendant Chris Zaganelli, a mellow, quizzical man with a brown ponytail and goatee and wire-rimmed glasses. "He's a grown man and he doesn't drive a car."

Zaganelli, who's lived in this small, southwestern Illinois town for most of his life, has an apartment above the liquor store, which has occupied the same Main Street storefront since 1934. Dean's is all booze and cigarettes, all the time -- albeit split into two halves: one for wine, the other for beer, liquor and tobacco products. The wine half exudes minimalist class, bottles arranged neatly in wooden racks, complete with the occasional *Wine Spectator* plaudit. With the exception of a few high-end spirits, the other half of Dean's, where Zaganelli stands watch, gives off the opposite vibe. Fruity cardboard four-packs of Jack Daniel's "malternatives" are stacked near the store entrance. A few steps down, a promo offers patrons who buy a bottle of Whiskey River whiskey a free CD single of Willie Nelson singing "Whiskey River." Which makes a lot of sense if you pause to think about it.

"This room's a whole 'nother world from the room in there," Zaganelli says of the spiritual division.

His cold case holds shelves filled with canned beer in 12-, 16-, 24- and 32-ounce (oil can) quantities, along with a smattering of Boone's Farm and Mad Dog 20/20 wines, two favorites of eight-o'clock-shadow vagrants and high-school girls. Dean's also stocks five different brands of an endangered species: the 40-ounce bottle of beer. Effectively banished from St. Louis through a crafty administrative order eleven years ago, Forties are increasingly hard to locate these days, especially on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River. But at Dean's, customers may choose among Forties of Budweiser, Bud Light, King Cobra, Evil Eye and Milwaukee's Best.

"The best-selling one is 'The Beast,'" says Zaganelli, calling Milwaukee's Best by its well-worn nickname. "I meet as many crazy people in the wine room as I do out here. Some of the 40-ounce buyers are extremely interesting, intelligent people. One regular buys one Forty every two days and just moseys with it. He's really fun to talk to."

Still, the Forty -- and its primary contents, malt liquor -- is low bottle on the totem pole, even in a bipartisan boozetopia such as Dean's.

"We've got a lady who buys a couple 24-ounce cans of Colt .45 every day," Zaganelli says. "She puts it in our commemorative carrying case: the brown paper bag. People who buy wine get a nicer bag."

Zaganelli doesn't waste the nice bags on Pedalin' Ken.

Kenny, you see, doesn't buy six twelve-ounce Beasts each day. Kenny buys six Forties, consuming them at a moderate pace. The logic is unassailable: If Kenny were to strap more than one Forty at a time to the back of his bike, he'd increase his odds of losing precious cargo on the ride home, or wherever he may roam.

Not that Zaganelli hasn't wondered why people like Kenny don't buy their Forties in bulk. The obvious assumption would be that Kenny's a street person, seeking the best bang for his buck every time he scrounges said buck. But downtown Collinsville isn't exactly the 'hood -- and Kenny isn't exactly a street person, says Zaganelli. The sum of which gives him pause for thought.

"A lot of people buy one at a time, several times per day," the clerk muses. "We went so far as to put a case price on them and say, 'Here, buy a case.' But I think it's a social thing.

"And," he adds, "you can say you only had one beer."

Jackie Chan sidekick Chris Tucker might be an internationally recognized comic actor and multimillionaire, but he has at least one outstanding debt.

"He still owes me \$4.35 for a chicken sandwich at Jack in the Box," maintains fellow comedian Robin Thompson, Tucker's onetime warmup act.

The 34-year-old Thompson, who has also opened for Bernie Mac and Cedric the Entertainer, is a lifelong north St. Louisan who grew up near the intersection of Natural Bridge and Kingshighway, the historic confluence immortalized by Nelly in song. These days Thompson's alcohol intake is somewhat constrained by the responsibilities of tending to a young family, not to mention the professional necessity of staying sharp after dark. But back when he hit the sauce with vigor, Thompson's motto was "Let's Get It Done." Which meant one of two things: a shot of tequila, or a Forty.

Never a tall can, always a Forty, and with good reason.

"Beer tastes better out of a glass," says Thompson, who favors St. Ides malt liquor, which takes its name from a fortune-telling Irish nun born in 475 A.D. "An ice-cold, frosty Forty is like being in a bar with a frozen mug. The Forty is like a buffet: You get all the beer you need in one bottle."

Dennis Buettner of Baltimore-based Beer Radio echoes Thompson's praise for the big bottle's efficiency. "The last time I bought a Forty was when I was going to a friend's house who didn't drink," says Buettner, whose organization is in the early phases of constructing a Beer Hall of Fame in (of all places) Cincinnati. "I didn't want to buy a six-pack, so I bought a Forty."

These days, inside the city limits of St. Louis, this entirely reasonable beer-drinking option is universally believed to be *illegal*.

In 1994, with the backing of then-Mayor Freeman Bosley Jr., the beer industry, package liquor stores and neighborhood groups, City Excise Commissioner Bob Kraiberg issued an administrative order banning retailers from selling 40-ounce bottles of beer below room temperature. Which is to say: No more cold Forties. In a reciprocal concession to the liquor industry, Kraiberg made legal the sale of single 16-, 24- and 32-ounce cans, which previously had to be sold in packages of at least three. The rationale cited for these measures was simple: too damn many Forties failed to find their way into trash cans, instead assailing the city's streets with shattered glass.

"Aluminum cans have a tendency to get picked up and recycled, but no one wants to pick up broken glass," Kraiberg enlarges. "It was a win-win-win across the board. The retailers liked it because it didn't take up as much room in their coolers, the brewers liked it because 24- and 32-ounce cans essentially replaced 40-ounce bottles, and the neighborhoods liked it because we eliminated tons of glass from the streets."

"It defeated the purpose entirely," counters a still-bitter Robin Thompson.

"The liquor companies were making money, because the 24-ounce cans cost the same as a Forty," puts in Bob Putnam, boozehound extraordinaire and proprietor of the Way Out Club at Jefferson and Gravois. "It's a win-win, sure -- except for the guys trying to get their nickels and dimes together to buy a Forty."

Which came first, the rapper or the trend?

"Hip-hop is just an avenue for everything now," argues Ali, a charter member of Nelly's St. Lunatics crew. "So there is no new trend."

Echoes local rapper Spaide R.I.P.P.E.R. (who favors Bacardi rum): "Rap gets too much credit and too much blame for people's decisions. You rap about what's going on. People get it ass-backwards."

When it comes to the 40-ounce phenomenon of the early 1990s, upstate New York-based writer Kihm Winship agrees.

"Young black musicians have been writing what they know about," says Winship, whose exhaustive essay "A Story Without Heroes: The Cautionary Tale of Malt Liquor," has become something of an underground phenomenon. "So it's logical and natural that the Forty would appear in music."

And appear it did. The first notable blast in a fusillade of 40-ounce anthems was fired in 1987 by the seminal rap supergroup N.W.A (Niggaz With Attitude) with "8 Ball," an homage to Olde English "800" malt liquor.

Olde English "800" 'cause that's my brand

Take it in a bottle, Forty, quart or can

Drink it like a madman, yes I do

Fuck the police and a 5-0 too

Vocalist Eric "Eazy-E" Wright took the brisk, take-no-bullshit call-to-swig to its one-line chorus: *Eazy-E's fucked up and got the 8 Ball rollin'.*

Young brothers heard that, including Ali. "The whole 8 Ball, 40-ounce thing, that was Eazy-E and all them," the rapper reminisces. "The best-tasting Forty was Budweiser, but it wouldn't get you as tore up as 8 Ball. 8 Ball would just tear you up."

Flavor notwithstanding (for the results of a gourmet 40-ounce tasting, see accompanying sidebar), Forties of malt liquor -- already a popular option in the black community -- became *the* beverage to have in hand, be it at a summer barbecue or on a street corner, fending off the heat one cold gold ounce at a time. But it wasn't until one of Wright's N.W.A bandmates picked up the 8 Ball and ran with it that Forties blew up large.

Long known for its high alcohol content (7 to 8 percent, as opposed to 5 percent for beer) and low price (it wasn't uncommon to scoop up a Forty for 99 cents), rather than for mainstream marketing efforts, malt liquor stepped into the spotlight in the early 1990s when the McKenzie River Corporation, makers of St. Ides (the beer now flies the Pabst Brewing Company flag), resolved to capitalize on the "8 Ball" phenomenon.

A formidable roster of musicians signed on for the ad campaign, which featured a series of one-minute emcee-mercials extolling the virtues of St. Ides. King Tee, DJ Pooh, Eric B & Rakim, Erick Sermon, the Geto Boys, Warren G, Nate Dogg, Scarface, the Wu Tang Clan, Snoop Dogg and O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson of N.W.A all stepped up to the mic.

Get your girl in the mood quicker, get your Jimmy thicker, with St. Ides malt liquor, rapped Cube.

S-T-Crooked-I-D-E-S: Guaranteed to get a big booty undressed.

I'm talking 'bout the St. Ides malt liquor: It'll prolly make ya faint. And you'll paint the town red, after you take a Forty-dog to the head.

Cuz I needed just a little more kick. Looked like a fish after just one sip.

Let's bell to the store. You broke? What? Dig deep into your Dickies, grab somethin'. And please, stop frontin'.

If you're lookin' for a brand-new beer, grab that S-T-Crooked-Ides. It's ironic -- it's like the chronic bionic.

I'm sorry, lemonade never got me buzzed like this. If it feels so good, black, I kinda wish they'd come up with a twelve-pack.

The St. Ides campaign became so popular that radio listeners began calling DJs and requesting the spots.

"When does *that* happen?" says DJ Drank, a San Francisco spinner who subsequently put together a limited-edition CD of the spots, entitled *DJ Drank's Greatest Malt Liquor Hits*.

The St. Ides campaign picked up the Forty by its bootstraps: In 1996 -- a year after Eazy-E died from AIDS -- malt liquor sales topped out over 9 million barrels. (Package-specific data is scarce; booze-industry bean counters use malt liquor sales figures as a barometer of the Forty's popularity.)

In classic tragic trajectory, the Forty's overheated popularity set it up for an epic fall.

"It was not to the advantage of the Forty to have this high a profile," theorizes Forty scholar Kihm Winship. "[The ad campaign] raised the Forty's visibility to people immediately outside the culture, at which point the Forty became more of a target: Now there are pastors and community leaders who know about this."

Smelling blood, the anti-Forty forces massed, accusing the liquor industry of peddling poison to people of color and blaming the big, bad bottle for every negative societal ill to be found in the black community at the time. Municipalities such as San Francisco, Seattle, Oakland and Portland took to restricting, if not outright banning, sales of 40-ounce bottles in downtrodden parts of town. In Pennsylvania's march toward 40-ounce prohibition, one Quaker State legislator referred to Forties of malt liquor as "liquid crack."

Health professionals hopped on the hyperbolic bandwagon, with a prominent Washington, D.C.-based physician named Walter Fagget claiming that malt liquor products were "gateway drugs that could pave the way to crack cocaine and other drugs." Then there was Brooklyn-based substance-abuse counselor LeeRoy Jordan, who, according to Winship's research, noted that the medieval symbol for steel that appeared on Steel Reserve's label resembled the digits "211" -- the alphanumeric gang translation of which is "blood killer."

Amid public pressure from high-profile minority leaders and liquor-control agencies, the Federal Communications Commission actually banned the St. Ides spots from the airwaves for three days.

Reflects comedian Robin Thompson: "I've seen people strung out on crack, and those statements do the drug epidemic a disservice. Yes, the beer was targeted at black people. But that's what advertisers do: They sell their product. In America you have choices. You don't have to buy a Forty -- and you shouldn't take away my right to go buy one."

"The people who market that stuff can't feel very good about it," says Julie Bradford, editor-in-chief of Durham, North Carolina-based *All About Beer* magazine. "But the people protesting can't feel too good either: It's been used as a scapegoat."

These days Ice Cube can be found burnishing his image as the next Bill Cosby in *Barbershop* sequels and PG-rated kid-flicks. And the closest thing rap has to a "gangsta" is 50 Cent, whose "thug life" consists of posing for spreads in *Teen People*, working pop tarts like Mariah Carey via a "Champagne campaign" and lending his name to a line of vitamin water dubbed Formula 50. Moreover, according to St. Lunatic Ali, the hottest drink among young adult hip-hop fans right now is pinot grigio.

Champagne, vitamin water and white wine: Eazy-E must be rolling over in his grave.

By 2003 malt liquor had declined to pre-N.W.A levels: about 5 million barrels annually. Bad news for the Forty, which, after surfing to lucrative infamy on 8 Ball's back, has had its cadaver-cold flesh gnawed off by two upstarts: "master cylinder" tall cans and a high-end hard liquor most often associated with ascot-clad WASPs with backyard tennis courts and wood-paneled dens.

"I think it's the 24-ouncers," says liquor-store clerk Chris Zaganelli. "But guys in their T-shirts will come in and buy Cognac pretty regularly. I call it the Cult of Hennessy."

Not long after Tupac Shakur's curious conversion from Digital Underground backup dancer to shrapnel-addled street thug, the 'Pac Man released the 1996 single "Thug Passion," a lyrical tribute to a 32-proof concoction of Hennessy and passionfruit juice called Alizé. Already a reasonably popular drink among blacks, Cognac began to simmer. Soon Snoop Dog and N.W.A alum Dr. Dre dropped their Forties to sing the praises of "Hen Dog."

"High-end Cognac picks up right where malt liquor fell off," confirms Harry Schuhmacher, editor and publisher of *Beer Business Daily*.

With the 2002 release of Busta Rhymes and Sean "P. Diddy" Combs' product-pimping rap anthem "Pass the Courvoisier," Cognac morphed into a cash-fueled craze. As sales skyrocketed, critics wondered aloud whether Allied Domecq, Courvoisier's parent company, had greased Diddy's palms during preproduction. Nah, said Combs, he and Busta were just rapping about what their people were already doing.

To Combs, then, the trend precedes the rapper.

Dave Karraker, vice president of communications for Allied Domecq, takes a different view.

"In 2002, when 'Pass the Courvoisier' came out, our brand spiked 30 percent," Karraker reports from his office in Westport, Connecticut. "Cognac has been a popular drink of African Americans since the 1940s, but we've really seen an increase in consumption since African Americans have had an outlet to discuss what's important to them -- and that's hip-hop music.

"Gangsta rappers weren't rapping about the things they aspire to have; they were rapping about the realities of the streets," Karraker continues. "Hip-hop music is more inspirational now than it was then. Look at the Cadillac Escalade, it's a perfect example."

Peretha Lewis, who along with her sister Vivian co-owns the East Coast Lounge on North Broadway in St. Louis, offers half-pint "setups" of Cognac and soda to her patrons for \$11. "It's picked way up from what it used to be," says Lewis, dating the turnaround to about 1998. "We sell all kinds of Cognac, but it's mostly been Hennessy."

St. Louis liquor czar Bob Kraiberg has not yet detected any significant rise in the level of broken Cognac bottles on the city's streets. Nor have the likes of Doctor Fagget denounced Courvoisier, whose alcohol content is 40 percent -- 80 proof -- as "meth in a tumbler."

Then there's the cost-value calculus: Should working-class warriors shell out their hard-earned bucks for a yacht-club cocktail while going into arrears on last month's gas bill?

"I have my doubts about Cognac, because the psychic rewards from going high-end actually return illusory benefits," opines George Hacker, head of the alcohol policy project at Washington, D.C.-based Center for Science in the Public

Interest. "Its popularity has to do with status, but it's not like buying a house. I don't think it has any real return for any population -- it's just potentially being hooked on a high-dollar drug."

Malt liquor was born because it had to be. The so-called Greatest Generation would have parched without it.

"It was a product of rationing during World War II," imparts Dennis "Beer Hall of Fame" Buettner. "They had a shortage of malt, so they decided they could do that with corn. And they kept making it."

According to beer historian Winship's reportage, Clix Malt Liquor was the first of its kind, in 1937, followed five years later by Sparkling Stite by Gluek. The latter's peculiar moniker touches on the tone of early malt pushers, who took their corn-based brew on a Champagne campaign that would make 50 Cent proud.

"It is a style that was originally made to be lighter," chimes in *All About Beer* magazine's Julie Bradford. "It was designed to appeal to the Champagne crowd. Malt liquor is simply a lager-style beer elevated to greater alcohol levels through brewing techniques that wring the last bit of alcohol out of the available sugar. It's just not very nice-tasting.

"Malt liquor has a rough-and-ready image now," Bradford continues. "But it takes a lot to put that stuff down."

The advent of Colt .45 showed brewers' willingness to use the product's gritty profile to their advantage. Colt, after all, is named after a lethal weapon and features as its logo a feral stallion that looks primed to break down the barn. Schlitz countered with its own logo, a bull, only to be succeeded by brands named after dragons, cobras, canines, lions, tigers and bears. (Oh my!)

"[It was] Noah's Ark gone bad, a wild kingdom in the cooler," Winship writes. "The allusions to potency were unleashed and unbridled."

Until that point, the face of post-civil rights Colt .45 was St. Louisan Redd Foxx, who gave the brew a crack-a-cold-one-on-your-dusty-porch charm. But in 1986 super-suave film icon Billy Dee Williams signed on as Colt .45's spokesman, announcing to television audiences that Colt .45 "works every time" -- typically speaking into the camera as some tall drink of hot cocoa attempted to rip off his blazer and chomp on his chest hair.

Wilt Chamberlain, the seven-foot basketball star who once scored 100 points in a single game and claimed to have notched 300 times that total in the bedroom, was subsequently recruited to promote Falstaff's Haffenreffer Private Stock malt liquor. "Nobody does it bigger," Wilt the Stilt bragged of his brand. Midnight Dragon took the sexual innuendo up yet another notch with a poster featuring a woman, a straw, some beer and the caption: "I could suck on this all night."

The promiscuous marketing campaign didn't fade until around the time malt liquor did, in the mid-'90s. Its apex may have been the 1995 introduction of a brand called Johnny 3 Legs (which requires no elaboration).

By the turn of the century, Forties of malt liquor had been left for dead, the product of sordid craftsmanship and a reputation to match. Antiquated delivery method, antiquated brewing method -- in short, there was no compelling reason for anyone to rescue either Forties or malt liquor.

Which is exactly why Sam Calagione is trying to save them both.

"Whenever something becomes out of fashion, there's always one person out there who tries to turn it around just for sport," says Dennis Buettner. "Sam is that guy."

"Sam is not afraid to stray into volatile territory," seconds Bradford. "Give a good brewer a box of Cheerios, and he can

make beer out of it."

In 2004 Calagione's small, Delaware-based Dogfish Head Brewery announced that it would produce 600 cases of a beer called Liquor de Malt, retailing at \$6.99 per 40-ounce bottle. The catch: Liquor de Malt would actually aspire to taste good, as Calagione and his chemists were intent on producing it with restaurant-grade, boutique corns rather than the traditional cheap shit. In a wink at the niche's streetwise infamy, each Forty would be sold with its own hand-stamped (with the Dogfish logo) brown paper bag and quaffing instructions.

"We were underwhelmed with how mass-produced malt liquor tasted," explains Calagione, whose brewery's motto is "Off-Centered Ales for Off-Centered People." "It's usually an inner-city beer that's being sold on price and elevated alcohol. Big brewers just use more corn syrup to make it. What we did was find some high-end corns from the food industry -- Aztec corn and blue corn, for example. Even though malt liquor is a much-maligned style, we wanted to show that you could make a high-quality malt liquor, using high-end ingredients."

He says the response from his distributors (Dogfish Head can be found in 25 states, including Illinois) was overwhelming.

"We got orders for 800 cases, so it was totally sold out before we even started bottling it," reports Calagione. "We hand-label and -twist caps onto every bottle, so we had giant sores on our palms. We have an automated line for our twelve-ounce beers, so I think we may try to build a bottling line that will allow us to do Forties at a more serious volume next year."

The sophomore run of Liquor de Malt went out the factory door last week. Should Calagione follow through, Buettner believes the malt-liquor Forty might enjoy a tasty renaissance.

"This guy makes blow-your-socks-off beer," the Hall of Fame hypester says of the man whose brewery produces 40-proof Worldwide Stout, billed as the world's strongest dark beer. "So what does he do? He goes after malt liquor. All it takes is somebody like this to turn it around."

Rutgers grad Pete "Bruz" Brusyo is 26 years old, lives in Bridgewater, New Jersey, and earns his keep as a starch-collared mortgage broker. When quittin' time rolls around, Brusyo's decompression routine is even more predictable than fixed interest rates and what type of trouser to wear on Hump Day.

"I put on a suit and tie by day," says Brusyo. "Then I go home, take it all off and crack open a Forty."

Brusyo claims to have the world's largest collection of 40-ounce bottles: 380 and counting (including Liquor de Malt, which Brusyo considers to be an instant classic). Since Brusyo founded a Web site documenting the exploits of his interstate "40-ounce Crew" (40ozMaltLiquor.com), no one has disputed his boast, so the title may well be legit.

"Nobody's ever stepped up and said otherwise," says Brusyo. "I found one guy who had, like, 90 bottles. Eventually I met that guy. We chilled and had some Forties.

"Now there are tons of people with over 100 bottles," he adds. "People do trades and stuff through my message boards."

The mortgage broker's obsession began by accident, during his junior year at Rutgers. He and his roommate shared an apartment whose kitchen had one prominent architectural feature.

"There was a big space between the cabinets and the ceiling, so I wanted to put some Forties up there," Brusyo recalls. "We got addicted to driving around looking for different brands, and it just escalated from there."

Shortly thereafter Brusyo debuted the Web site, which now boasts 1,200 registered members. This legion of inebriates commonly tips off Bruz to the location of obscure Forties, and without fail the sightings dictate the direction of the consummate collector's next vacation.

"I've never done a road trip just for a Forty," Brusyo says modestly. "But I've gone to Quebec City and picked up every Forty along the way."

As Brusyo's site grew in popularity -- particularly engrossing is the "Edward Fortyhands" photo gallery, a candid-camera chronicle of a campus craze in which revelers duct-tape a Forty to either hand and are permitted to do nothing until both bottles have been drained -- it seemed logical for regular contributors to arrange meet-ups. A recent outing saw a few dozen Crew members tear up Chicago with Forties in hand, an experience one reveler sculpted into a fifteen-minute malt-umentary set to a ghetto-fabulous soundtrack.

"Basically, we drink," Brusyo says of his Crew's social itinerary. "We don't get completely reckless or wasted. It's basically just two or three days and nights of partying."

The Crew being predominantly Caucasian, Brusyo openly admits that a healthy shot of ironic thug-life fetishizing is a key component of the big bottle's rugged allure.

"I think all the negative attention makes the Forty more appealing," he says. "If they were as commonplace as twelve-ouncers, I wouldn't be as interested. But because Forties have a ghetto theme, it makes it more amusing and fun."

He's isn't alone in extracting humor from the beleaguered brew. Thirty-three-year-old Josh Alt thinks low-class beer is so funny that he and two buddies recently opened the Tin Can Tavern & Grille, an establishment dedicated to cheap, retro cans of beer and malt liquor. While there are some hoity-toity brews on the joint's 50-beer list, the Tin Can's kitsch appeal lies in \$1.50 cans of forgotten swill like Olympia, Pabst, Stag, Milwaukee's Best, Micekeys, Colt .45 and Camo malt liquor -- beverages that craft brewers such as Calagione might politely refer to as bottom-of-the-barrel crap.

"We think it's funny that all these brands are still available," Alt explains.

Still, the popularity of the tavern, which opened a mere three months ago on Morganford Road a few blocks south of Tower Grove Park, has vastly exceeded the expectations of its proprietors, all alums of the venerable St. Louis landmark Llywelyn's Pub.

"The beer business is blowing us away," reports Alt. "In south city, there's definitely a desire for cheap beer, and canned beer's the best vehicle for that."

Challenged with the counterargument that Forties might be a superior delivery system to the can, Alt pleads obsolescence.

"I haven't seen a Forty in five years," he says. "It's my impression that you can't sell them in the city."

Old-timers recall that up until the 1980s, it was possible to procure a Forty barside.

"Miss B's was a black club on Vandeventer, near Novak's," recalls Way Out Club owner Bob Putnam. "It looked really small from the outside, but it went back a ways.

"I used to go to a place called the Blue Pheasant in East St. Louis with Miss B and her crew after hours," Putnam goes on. "They used to sell quart bottles there. But that was, like, twenty years ago."

So if Alt, who already has nostalgia coursing through his veins, could turn back time, would he?

"I think it'd be funny [to serve Forties]," he says. "I mean, that's kind of our whole concept."

As it turns out, establishments with appropriate liquor licenses are legally permitted to sell cold Forties, just as surely as they can sell bottles of fine white wine, assures booze boss Bob Kraiberg.

"It could be consumed on-premise if they have a full drink license," says the city's liquor chief. "I would want to follow the spirit of that [1994] order, which was to keep glass off the street. If somebody drank a 40-ounce bottle inside -- poured it into a glass or whatever and consumed it on-premises -- I wouldn't have a problem with it."

No more than 96 hours after Alt was informed of Kraiberg's legal opinion on the matter, the Tin Can commenced offering Forties of Olde English "800" and Miller High Life, thus joining Beulah's Red Velvet Lounge on Martin Luther King Drive as one of only two city establishments (Gino's Lounge, located just west of the city limits on Natural Bridge, also serves High Life Forties) whose menus continue to pay homage to the iconic glass vessel.

The Forty is dead. Long live the Forty.