

# coverstory

## Nisei Lounge the last true Wrigleyville bar

BY DAVE HOEKSTRA  
dhoekstra@suntimes.com

**L**ike a faded hero in the on-deck circle, the Nisei Lounge is the last real neighborhood bar in Wrigleyville.

Located at 3439 N. Sheffield, it's also the longest-running bar in Wrigleyville, dating back to 1951. Kaunch Hirabayashi opened the original Nisei Lounge in 1949 at Clark and Division. When the bar moved to its present location, Chicago was home to more than 150,000 Japanese-Americans, about 30,000 of whom had been interned in camps during World War II. (The "Nisei" are second-generation, American-born children of Japanese immigrants.)

The Nisei Lounge was supposed to close in 2008 as the result of a fallout between previous partners. A farewell party was thrown. But like so many plans in the Cubs orbit, things changed.

Chicagoans Craig Morrall and Brian Pistorius purchased the Nisei at the beginning of baseball season, 2010. They were longtime Cubs fans who loved the neighborhood and old-school bars. They work in the corporate world and had never owned a bar or restaurant.

"We wanted to keep it alive," Morrall said. "It is the last neighborhood bar in Wrigley, and that's our niche. It's more laid-back. We are drawing a more regular base of young people because they like the atmosphere and the neighborhood style that has left Wrigley."

Morrall 40, and Pistorius, 31, have preserved the no-frills character while cleaning up the bathrooms and updating amenities like accepting credit cards. They kept the rock 'n' roll jukebox and the pool table, which is an important point. Most Wrigleyville neighborhood bars have eliminated pool tables because space is better used for customers. Daily Nisei



**Craig Morrall, owner of Nisei Lounge, in Wrigleyville has embraced the Nisei's status as a neighborhood bar.** | SCOTT STEWART-SUN-TIMES

specials include 16-ounce cans of Old Style and Schlitz for \$4. That is really old-school.

"The Cubs' success or failures definitely affects business in the entire neighborhood," Morrall said. "We are a victim of the Cubs. This year has hurt us as a small business operator. We're not a corporation that owns six establishments beyond the Nisei Lounge. But we don't rely completely on the Cubs. We try to promote it in other ways."

Bruce Springsteen sets up camp at Wrigley this weekend. He will be sure to sing about "Glory Days" that are foreign to Cubs nation.

"Concert business has been sporadic," Morrall said. "Paul McCartney drew an older crowd which didn't go to bars as much, versus Dave Matthews who draws a much younger crowd. Concerts have not been as lucrative in the neighborhood as all of us had hoped."

*A tribute to the late great Wrigleyville Tap and its clients Eddie Vedder and Joe Strummer can be found at [blogs.suntimes.com/hoekstra](http://blogs.suntimes.com/hoekstra).*