

## Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep Calm and Hop On Tour  
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Hop #322

### Off The Hook

920 Caroline Street

Friday, November 22, 2019, 5:15 PM

*Founder's Day IPA (fraught) \$4 HH*

Ordered me some tots. Sweet Tater Tots, at that. For tree bux. How can you go wrong for just tree bux? And they come with maple syrup! Hell yes, Jess.



The last time I had Sweet Tater Tots was at Deuce's Off The Hook at 728 Simonton Street, back in, hmm, 2014? And — ya know what? — this is the very same business. It has a new location (duh) and slightly different name (what happened to Deuce?), so it definitely counts as a new Hop.



I escaped from work a little early on this Friday, and the beautiful 79-degree weather beckoned me out of my little jungle hideaway and back into the flow of civilization.

This end of Caroline Street has a pretty mellow flow. There is a dearth of foot traffic. That's probably why the previous few tenants — Key West Bite (#268), Joe's Place (#246) and JDL's Big Ten (#45) — didn't last. Survival here will depend on being more destination than whim.

And that's what it was for me. Off the Hook has been here for a long time — a year, maybe? — so the Hop was *long* overdue.

I rolled up Caroline on Trekko the Wonderbike, and spied a good-natured woman standing out front, flashing a 2-foot-by-2-foot hand-drawn sign at passers-by. It said, "Happy Hour" and had a drawing of a martini glass on it. I parked Trekko in the parking garage next door and walked back. She turned the sign to hit me with its full force.

"Are there happy people in there?" I asked.

"There sure are!" she grinned.

"That's for me!" And in I went.

The dining room was just about empty, but the bar was well-populated. I took the only open seat. The barkeep was Happy-Hour-busy, so I settled in and took in the scene.



There was a black-and-white movie on TV. The guy standing next to me – he had said he didn't want the seat, so OK -- thought it was the Three Stooges. He was firing off lines like, "Just looking for a drink of water," and "Turn on anything, you'll get it!" He kept at it for a while, too. Given that he knew the lines, it was puzzling that he didn't recognize that the action



bore no resemblance to that episode, or any other Stooges episode. Maybe he was just reliving it in his mind and that blocked his cognitive ability. Ya, maybe.

I placed my order, snapped a few OTH photos, did a little plippage on the old tablet, and before I could ponder the enormity of the universe, I was swilling my cold IPA and chowing my piping hot tots. Happy Hops.

The bar was clearing out fast, or some reason. Perhaps they were daunted by my presence. Perhaps. It gave the barkeep some relaxed chat time,

though. The standing Stooge had departed, and an elder gentleman who had connection to a local restaurant, was sitting one more seat over. Jim the bartender – he seemed like a Jim, dunno what he really is – and Ed the elder – ditto – were talking about the comings and goings within the KW F&B landscape. I blended myself into the convo. Jim said that Off The Hook had relocated primarily to get more space. I could understand that; the prior location was more bar than restaurant (fine with me, of course).

There was conversation about the imminent closure of White Tarpon (#31, and #185). At that point, Ed became a bit of a broken record, stunting every new attempted topic with something like, “well, it all comes down to, can ya pay the rent.” To Jim and I, that went without saying, but to Ed, it had to be said, I guess.

Soon, the three of us were the only ones at the bar. Two deuces were dining by the front window, and there was a couple in the outdoor patio area – this place really can hold a *lot* of people. My heaping pile of tots was down to five. Just five little tots remained. But I was sated. No doggy bag, thanks.



I asked Jim what the HH deal was. If it was 2-for-1, I would've been a fool to leave (and, thus, would have stayed). He told me, though, that my draft Founder's Day IPA was only fo' dolla. Happy Hops indeed.

He brought me my tab. \$7.53 total. That is as sweet as maple syrup, baby. I left a sawbuck on the bar and moved on.