

Photos By Phelan M. Ebenhack

Right: Ninety-year-old Shiner brewery employee Herbert Siems relaxes with long-time friend Arnold Stanek — both were born and raised in Shiner. Stanek has known Siems all his life, and now regularly stops by the brewery to drink a beer and check up on Siems. Siems has enjoyed pouring free beers to visitors at the brewery for 26 years and claims, "I've got the best damn job in town."

Below: Bottles of Shiner Bock beer await packaging at the back of the brewery.



Shiner — THE b

By Yvonne Salce

Behind cow pastures, alongside Boggy Creek is Texas' only little hometown brewery and the heart of Shiner, Texas.

The 82-year-old K. Spoetzl Brewery produces 38,000 barrels of Shiner beer a year, and draws anywhere from one to 40 visitors a day who come to tour the small factory and drink free beer.

The brewery, which employes 36 people, produces 2,000 a bottles of beer a day. Most employees have been working in the K. Spoetzl Brewery for at least 28 years.

Herbert Siems is no exception.

Siems, born and raised in Shiner, helped build the brewery in 1909. He now operates the hospitality room a tiny, warm room where visitors and locals can hear

and smell Shiner beer being brewed, but most importantly taste the secret formula.

Many of the locals start coming in around 10 a.m. to get their complimentary beer.

"The first beer is free," says Siems, "and then I hand them two tokens for two more free beers.

"Out-of-towners can drink as much as they want," he adds.

Friends, oldtimers and visitors drop in to quench their thirst and consume the welcoming atmosphere. Arnold G. Stanek, a 75-year-old retired teacher, has known Siems all his life.

"I visit Siems everyday," says Stanek. Raising his

cup of Shiner Bock, he adds, "This is some good stuff."

Meanwhile, Siems makes sure no one has an empty cup, filling them up with either Shiner Premium or Bock, a dark-colored, rich and flavorful beer. Some might refer to Bock as an "acquired taste," but Siems says the beers are equally popular.

"We have Bock on tap, all year round," he says. "We get a lot of people in here. Sometimes in the afternoon, you can't get in this place."

People come in from all over the country to visit the quaint-looking brewery.

The tour, lasting an average of 15 minutes, begins in the "powerhouse" or engine room where two boilers produce enough steam for brewing and pasteurizing.