



Cell Block continues as neighborhood, fetish-friendly bar under new leadership

By Ross Forman

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Matthew Dontje has moved into the Head Bartender role at [Cell Block](#) in Boystown, and is focused on helping the neighborhood bar with a fetish-friendly attitude realize a new era while maintaining its rich history and tradition.

Dontje replaces Mark Bowden, who moved back to Texas late last year.

"Taking over the bar was bittersweet," said Dontje, who turns 44 on Jan. 4 and has worked at the Boystown bar for about 3 1/2 years. "Mark and I had become close and it was hard seeing him go. I have been bartending on Halsted Street for almost 15 years and never really wanted to have the responsibility of being a manager. (But), the time felt right to make my move to more responsibility."

Dontje is originally from Grand Ledge, Mich., and has lived in Chicago for the past 20 years.

"The strengths of the [Cell Block](#) come from (its) diversity," he said. "Being a bar that offers a home to many types of events, from pool and dart leagues in the front (bar, to) monthly fetish parties in the back (bar); we draw a diverse crowd."

And Dontje said the bar is looking to expand its role for clubs and events, including private parties, meetings and fundraisers.

"I am looking to improve an overall awareness for the bar. I want [Cell Block](#) to be the local spot that you make your home bar," he said.

[Cell Block](#) has two full-time employees, five part-timers. "Most of our (employees) have other jobs in (the) community – mild-mannered by day, sexy barmen by night," he said.

Dontje said 2017 was a year of change for [Cell Block](#). "We said goodbye to some dear friends (last) January, and it was rough," he said. "This is a bar of community; we mourn and celebrate together.

"We welcomed a new club into our bar, The Windy City Boys Troop. The Boys Troop is a great group of guys centered on boyhood and brotherhood within our community.

"IML came and went and we got to see some old faces, make some new friends. The summer brought us Pride and Market Days which, after over 20 years, was pretty much business as usual. By Market Days we knew that Mark was leaving to be closer to his family, so I was offered his position. September we celebrated Mark with several parties, (then it was) finally time to say goodbye to our dear friend of so many years.

"(For) Halloween, we ran with a traditional gore vibe with an 'IT' theme. November brought us Thanksgiving and a great day, complete with a complementary feast for anyone who was around and in need of some holiday cheer."

[Cell Block](#) continued its annual holiday drive, and is still accepting coats and non-perishables, which will be donated to Corner Stone Community Center in Uptown. Donations will be accepted through January 6.

"I hope to make 2018 a year of growth," for the bar, Dontje said.

One of the most popular events at [Cell Block](#) is run by the Chicago Puppy Patrol on the third Friday of every month. Plus, the Chicago Area Gear Enthusiasts (CAGE) have a monthly event on the second Friday of each month. The Windy City Boys Troop is at [Cell Block](#) on the first Friday of the month.

So yes, [Cell Block](#) is still open for business – with cold beer, stiff shots and plenty of attitude. And, as Dontje noted, "Be prepared for anything."

"You never know what you are going to see at the [Cell Block](#) – puppies in masks, boys in rubber, girls in leather, singlets, and whatever other misfit toys wander through the front door," he said. "The rules for [Cell Block](#) are simple: have a good time and don't be an asshole. Everyone is welcomed here. We have a diverse crowd and we respect one another. If you are here to cause problems for others, you will be asked to leave."

At The Bar With ... Matthew Dontje

Favorite Local Bars (beside [Cell Block](#)): [Jackhammer](#) and Touché.

Favorite Chicago Restaurant: "This one is hard (to answer) because I like to eat and this city has so many great choices. If I had to pick a favorite, it would be Erie Street Cafe. It is an old-school steak joint on Erie Street – best steaks in the city."

Favorite Holiday: Halloween, followed by Christmas. "I come from a long line of crafters and makers, so the visual aspects of both holidays appeal to me."

One Celebrity You'd Like To Meet: Dolly Parton. "Her message has always struck a chord with me. Plus, my dog's name is Jolene."

Dream Vacation Destination: "Some small Mediterranean destination where I can just sit and enjoy the sea, while half naked, tanned and toned men cater to my every need."

Pizza Ingredients: "I love anchovies."

(Complete this sentence): Even my close friends will be surprised to learn ... "that I was bitten by a piranha when I was 13, (and) still have the scar."

Boxers or Briefs: "To be honest, I usually just go commando. But if it's cold, I like a boxer-brief ... my boys don't like the cold."