



Photo courtesy of Nathan Caldwell

Pipeline Club

112 Egan Drive, Valdez, AK (907) 835-4332

License Issued: 1969 to Valdez Motel Corp. (Jack E. Cole, President) **CLOSED 2015**

Amenities: Pool tables, darts, full-swing golf, juke box, occasional live entertainment, restaurant

Web Site: Facebook. YouTube

History and Notoriety: The March 27, 1964 earthquake damaged Valdez to the point that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers condemned the original townsite. By the fall of 1967, the town had officially moved to its current location, and lobbying to have new Valdez become the terminus for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline had begun. Valdez was chosen in 1969, over Anchorage, Seward, and Whittier. Jack Cole, his wife Florence, and partner Richard Gunloason wasted no time in opening the Pipeline Club Hotel and bar. In 1971, they sold the entire operation to Bill Osborn, Harry Piland, and James “Bill” Lee. By the mid-70’s, the population of Valdez had swollen from a pre-pipeline base of about 500 to approximately 10,000. The Pipeline Club and the Club Valdez next door were very popular bars with the “pipeliners.” The high salaries paid to the workers during those years guaranteed that the bell was rung (“timbered”) regularly in both bars.

The Pipeline Club is truly notorious for its role in the events of March 23, 1989. On that day, Joseph Hazelwood, the moody Captain of the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez*, came into the bar and drank double shots of vodka on the rocks. Exactly when he came in (as early as noon or as late as 4:30 PM) and how many drinks he had (at least two and probably three) is still a matter of conjecture. At approximately 7:30 PM, Captain Hazelwood and his companions ordered pizza and went next door to the Club Valdez where they had more drinks. By 8:30, they had picked up the pizza and were in a cab heading back to the ship. The *Exxon Valdez* left the dock at 9:26 PM and struck Bligh Reef at approximately 12:04 AM on March 24, spilling at least 10 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound. At the subsequent trial, prosecutors failed to prove Hazelwood was intoxicated. He was acquitted on all felony charges but convicted of a misdemeanor charge for discharge of oil, fined \$50,000, and sentenced to 1,000 hours of community service.

During the oil spill clean-up, businesses in Valdez thrived. Bill Lee, manager of the Pipeline Club at the time, told a reporter that business was “better than the pipeline days” and that he had to extend the hours of operation from 8 AM to 5 AM.

With the closing of the historic Club Valdez in 2009, the Pipeline Club is now the oldest bar in town.

Visiting the Pipeline Club: This is a good place to mingle with the locals (plenty of fishermen and skiers). Live music can be found here in the summer months. The full-swing golf room is a big draw.