

Gourmet coffee

By Kimberly Horg-Webb
Special to the Fig Garden Villager

It is important to be able to take a break and relax with friends. Micah Alan Johnson, the owner of Cigars, Ltd., says while growing up in Fresno he dreamed of a place that people could go and hang out like on the classic '80s television show "Cheers."

"My dad and I used to sit and smoke cigars out back because mom wasn't going to let us smoke in the house. We thought opening a store where people could come in and have a cigar along with friends would be like opening a 'Cheers,' " he says.

He says the business has actually become just like the favored TV show, with its own Norm and Cliff. He has become just like the bartender, Sammy (without the chick magnet part). People can come in for one cigar and find themselves spending the day there socializing.

"Cigars are a commodity that can be purchased anywhere but the people who work here and hang out here just make it a very special meeting place," he says.

It offers customers a unique experience because it has one of the largest humidors in California. Visitors can get overwhelmed with the large selection of cigars.

It breaks down each brand in its humidor by having a "Main Event" featuring a different brand each month. The event is like a big party where people can enjoy smoking one of the featured cigars at half price. A representative or owner of the featured cigar comes in to help explain the taste of each brand. It usually has a no host bar from the Elbow Room as well as raffle prizes to make it worth wild.

There is a 2010 events calendar with every event planned this year in the store as well as online at fresnocigar.com. The next big event is on tax day, April 15. The featured cigars are CAO. The president of the company will be there to explain what makes the product unique.

Rocky Patel is the number one seller followed by Drew Estate, CAO, Gurkha and Joya de Nicaragua. Rocky Patel is from Honduras. His cigars are most popular because he is so involved in the sorting of the leaves, the fermentation process and the blending.

"I went to Honduras with about 12 customers and my brother, Kirk," Johnson says. "My brother was such a

huge hit with Rocky that he now makes this blend exclusively for us. It is called the Maduro of Costa Rica." The community has responded well to his business. Johnson says he thinks when times get hard people like to come together. And his cigar shop provides an atmosphere for fun.

Coffee beans have also always caught Johnsons' interest. During his travels to tobacco regions around the world, he has tasted fantastic coffee grown just a hillside away. Coffee that is grown high in the mountains has a better quality than coffee grown below 4000 feet in elevation.

He recently started looking into the possibility of importing the beans green and having a local roasting company roast them fresh so he could offer them to his customers.

"It is like growing vegetables in your own garden. They taste better than what you can buy in the grocery store," he says.

Fresno resident and Cigars, Ltd. customer, Mike Insalaco, wants to try every flavor of FG Beans to make sure he finds the one that he likes the best. He says so far the Black Gold FG Beans are his favorite.

"I like a thick, black coffee with nothing in it, just richness and flavor," Insalaco says. "The Black Gold bean gives me all that, but with none of the burnt flavor or acidic bite of some of the national coffee brands. I think beans are going to do really well with people like me who really want to savor a cup of perfect coffee."

According to him, FG Beans are fantastic. The beans are from different countries and depending on a persons' taste bud, there is something for everyone. Even non-smokers who don't like cigars will love the world class coffee Johnson is importing into the Valley.

The cigar store sells the beans whole or ground, but does not yet offer a coffee service — although it might be something it will do in the future.

"Enjoy a cigar in our lounge and find out how my cigar store transforms into your cigar store with each puff," Johnson says. "People are what make this place great, cigars are just the invitation." Cigars, Ltd. is open Monday through Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Thursday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays it is open from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. For more information call 221-0161.