

Self-service beer has big debut at Littlest Bar

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It's like every guy's dream, Keith Mahoney said yesterday at The Littlest Bar in Boston.

"You get to go to a bar and pour your own drink," Mahoney, 34, said. "I've never seen another place offer something like this."

If you fancy yourself a bartender, or always wanted to pull your own pint of Guinness, check out the newest in self-service beer gadgetry at the Financial District watering hole. The Broad Street bar is the first in Massachusetts to install the Draft Master, a tabletop tap system made in Ireland that lets bar-goers pour their own drafts.

Ellickson International installed the two-tap mobile version at The Littlest Bar yesterday, with Guinness and Smithwick's kegs hooked into the self-contained table unit that controls the flow, temperature and gas mixture.

Bar owner Paddy Grace believes customers will be intrigued by the novelty of the system, with its illuminated taps and LCD screen that shows how many pints are poured.

"What I like about it is when you walk into a bar and see it, you're interested right away, and say, 'What the heck is this?'" Grace said. "It's an eye-catcher."

Customers who want to use the Draft Master give their credit card to a bartender just as they would to open a regular bar tab. The bartender swipes a magnetic card through a point-of-sale system behind the bar to open the wirelessly connected table-mounted taps so customers can begin pouring.

The Draft Master launched in Ireland in 2009 when Guinness owner Diageo contracted Ellickson to install the units in 300-plus bars as part of its "Pour Your Own Pint" campaign. The company has sold 30 units in the United States in the last 2 months at a cost of about \$10,000 for the first table and system, which can service additional tables.

To prevent over-indulgences, bartenders preset the system to "pause" after each person at the table has had two drinks. After checking on the table, they can then decide whether to resume the Draft Master's operation or shut off the customers.

Grace isn't worried that drinkers of Guinness - the bar's best-selling keg beer - tend to be the fussiest about getting a properly poured pint of the stout. Bartenders will instruct customers on how to use the Draft Master.

"The consumer who loves Guinness can come and get the perfect pint and experience the perfect pour themselves," said Una Colohan, a Diageo distribution manager on hand for the installation.

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