

Smoking Allowed

BU's Cigar Aficionado Society offers social alternative



↑ **THERESA STRACHILA** (CAS'12), at a Friday evening meeting of the Boston University Cigar Aficionado Society at Churchill's Lounge in Boston, says there's a mystique about the club.

← **DAN LOPERFIDO** (CAS'11), treasurer of the society, enjoys a smoke.



VERNON DOUCETTE

A SLEEVE OF pearl-white smoke rolls from Theresa Strachila's mouth as the bartender brings over a jug of ice water. In the dim light, students sink into leather couches and wingback chairs, lit cigars between their fingers. Tiny stacks of tapped ash fill the oversized ashtrays like ruins. Outside, car lights cut across the plate-glass windows fronting Boston's North Street.

BU's Cigar Aficionado Society is one of the school's 400 or so student clubs, and at 10 years old, among its longest running. At the semiannual Student Activities Expo, theirs is the table that gets the most double takes, and school tour guides are known to single it out to prospective students.

"There's a mystique about the club," says Strachila (CAS'12). "I get emails all the time saying, 'I don't know if you're an exclusive club, but can I please join?' Or, 'I don't smoke cigars very well, but here are my qualifications.' I'm like, please come,

there aren't any applications."

On a recent Friday evening at Churchill's Lounge, near Faneuil Hall, cigars are slipped from cellophane wrappers, clipped, and lit, a constellation of orange suns glowing through mist. The conversation is as thick as the smoke, swirling around such topics as the origin of brandy, the disparity in quality of BU dorms, the University's printing quota, and concerns over finding work. In a box on the table, club president Strachila fingers out a San Cristobal, a boutique cigar handcrafted in Nicaragua by José "Pepin" Garcia, and hands the stick to a visitor. She's also brought a box of Ashton Aged Maduros, a medium-bodied smoke with Dominican-grown leaf.

"I enjoy the flavor and the taste," she says. "I like that smoking a cigar is a communal event. A good cigar takes an hour to smoke. You enjoy it, you enjoy the company of people around you."

Strachila estimates that there are

10 or so regulars in the club, with 45 people on the mailing list. Members hail from all over the University. Students from other local colleges drop by, too, she says. The club always gathers at Churchill's, one of only a handful of cigar bars still left in the city (the Boston Health Commission has ordered them all shut by 2018 and banned the opening of new ones). The group also puts on formal events at the lounge and organizes trips to Suffolk Downs, with stops at local tobacconists. Dean of Students Kenneth Elmore (SED'87) has been known to show up for a stogie.

"The cigar club is one of the last social things you can do at a university where you can just meet people without any real goal to accomplish at the end of the night," says club treasurer Dan Loperfido (CAS'11), a philosophy major.

No one is more pleased about the growth of the Cigar Aficionado Society than Drinnan Thornton (CAS'03, SED'05), a bartender at Churchill's and a residence hall director at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. He started the club when he was a freshman. Like Loperfido, he was a philosophy major, a course of study that seems to fit well with puffing on a stogie.

"Smoking a cigar lends itself very well to just thinking and ruminating about the world, without a doubt," he says. **CALEB DANILOFF**