

# Calendar

## Toast Masters

### Coffee Bean Club

**'M**y neighbors can smell it when I'm roasting coffee," says Michael Allen Smith, "and they want some." He started roasting his own green beans in 1998. He thinks of it as "customizing" his coffee — and as a natural progression in a search for a better-tasting cup of joe. He has been drinking coffee since 1990, when he was 20. He knows how to roast coffee six or seven different ways, but he most often uses a West Bend

#### LOCAL EVENTS

popcorn popper, circa 1979, that he bought

on eBay. He gets his beans online at [sweetmarias.com](http://sweetmarias.com).

Smith, who lives near the Wild Animal Park, is a programmer and database administrator. In his spare time, he created the website [www.ineedcoffee.com](http://www.ineedcoffee.com). "The most important thing about home roasting is the taste," he writes there. He does not order coffee in restaurants — instead, he'll drink water or maybe V-8 juice. To explain his preference for home-roasted coffee, he uses the analogy of home-baked cookies. "Which would you rather have? A chocolate-chip cookie out of the oven or Chips Ahoy?"

Smith says that until he learned about it in this interview, he was not familiar with the San Diego Home Roasters Club. Its founder, Jim Lane, says membership in his one-year-old group is growing only slowly through contacts made through the newsgroup [alt.coffee](http://alt.coffee). One to five people have been showing up at monthly meetings.

Lane, who lives in Kensington, says, "I began drinking coffee seriously in 1984." And "seriously" means? "It's not about the amount of coffee; it's about the quality," he says. He uses a Hearthware Gourmet coffee roaster, the size of a food processor. He roasts half a cup of beans at a time — for nine minutes. The supply lasts five mornings. He drinks the rest of his coffee at San Diego's "really good coffeehouses." Besides North Park's Caffé Calabria, where owner Arne Holt lets the group meet, he names Peet's Coffee & Tea in Hillcrest.

Most people roast their beans outdoors unless they have a good fan, says Lane. "They generate a lot of smoke, because of the oil they're giving off." The smell is sweet and smoky, not the smell of coffee brewing. The roaster makes noise: "It's pretty loud. It's like a vacuum cleaner." Afterward, there's a waiting period — freshly roasted beans need to "rest" 24 hours before being used. Lane buys his beans locally. He tries to get arabica — high-level. He also tries both for fair trade ("They're

tough to get") and organic ("Which are much easier").

A marketing and international business teacher at a University of Phoenix satellite campus here, the 59-year-old Lane started the club because he thought, "If I'm here, there have to be other people here like me." He says the meetings are "a place to learn 'best practices' kind of stuff." It's "very informal, no charter, no officers, no nothing."

About a year ago, Dennis Reed

found a roaster in a thrift shop in Poway, where he lives. Did he recognize it right away for what it was? "Yes, it was in the box, brand-new. I'm a kitchen-gadget freak," he explains. He paid \$20. He tried a few roastings with it but had questions, which he posted on [alt.coffee](http://alt.coffee). It was Lane who responded. Since attending his first meeting at Caffé Calabria in January, Reed has been stocking up on green beans. "I've got 15 or 20 different varieties to work with now," he says. He has bought locally as well as ordered directly from two growers in Hawaii.

Reed is a quantity guy. "I have a high caffeine tolerance," he says. "I drink 8, 12 cups a day, maybe more. That's eight-ounce cups. But I don't necessarily drink it every day. Some days I drink tea instead." He laughs. Asked if he stays up late, he says, "It has nothing to do with the coffee, but I am a night person. I have been a musician as an avocation since the early '60s."

Age 63 and retired ("Thank goodness") from 35 years as a programmer, Lane likes his coffee sweet. "I was a sugar baby in my youth. But I don't add sugar. What I use is French vanilla Coffeemate creamer." To brew his coffee, Reed uses an old Silex, "with the two glass globes." He says he bought it secondhand not long ago. It was after the image of ones from his past suddenly came into his head. "When I was young, about 15 or 16, I used to deliver newspapers to a café, and they had those Silexes there, and I remember when they roasted the coffee at 5:00 a.m. It stuck in my memory." This was in El Segundo, near L.A. "I used to go in and get a piece of pie and, even though I was young, a cup of coffee early in the morning. Fond memories."

— Jeanne Schinto

**San Diego Home Roasters Club monthly meeting**  
**Saturday, March 27**  
**(and every last Saturday)**  
**10:00 a.m.-noon**  
**Caffé Calabria**  
**3933 30th Street, North Park**  
**Free**  
**619-291-1759**



Jim Lane (left) with his home coffee roaster

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE ALLEN

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