

## UKULELE

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jackalope. Several people laughed as they looked at the furry instruments, its body covered with a dark pelt and its top decked with a jackrabbit's head and antelope horns.

"With so many players and resulting ukulele collections, it was only a matter of time before some of these ukuleles, perhaps wandering away from their homes or even abandoned, began mingling with the local fauna," a one-page description reads. "The result, as you see here, is the ukalope."

"We're trying to make Santa Cruz a little bit weirder," Julie Baron said with a laugh.



Tiki King Pat Baron offers a toast to his store's one-year anniversary.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

# Year of the Uke

Ukulele fans flock to Tiki King's for one-year anniversary

By KIMBERLY WHITE  
kwhite@santacruzsentinel.com

FELTON — Dozens of uke players and fans drifted through the door of Tiki King's Ukuleles of Felton late last week, shunning the official kickoff to the holiday shopping season in favor of camaraderie through music.

The sound of ukuleles spilled out of the small storefront and onto the street as local musicians Ukulele Dick, Jayme Kelly Curtis and Topher Gayle kicked off the first set during Ukuleles of Felton's one-year anniversary celebration, their fingers flying as they sang "Let's Misbehave" by Cole Porter and "The Blues for Dixie" by Bob Wills.

Pat and Julie Baron opened Ukuleles of Felton a year ago last Friday on Highway 9, across the street from New Leaf Market. The store sells everything from ukuleles and Hawaiian T-shirts and tikis to books and CDs about the diminutive instruments, which originated in Portugal.

The storefront is an expansion of Tiki King, an online business Pat Baron started in 1993 that specializes in tiki items. He said he purchased his first ukulele for \$12 in 1999, the year after he began working in San Jose for a now-defunct music company that provided online hosting for independent bands.

Stuck in traffic for long stretches of time, he said he'd pick up his ukulele



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Ukulele Dick, Jayme Kelly Curtis and Tofer Gayle entertain in Pat Baron's Tiki King's Ukuleles of Felton on Friday.

and practice while waiting for traffic to start moving along.

Though the couple expected most traffic to come from established players, they say the majority of their customers have only recently started playing the instrument. With only four strings, it's easier to learn, less expensive than larger stringed counterparts and has less of a stuffy following.

"The ukulele community is so open," Pat Baron said. Players of other stringed instruments such as

violins, guitars and cellos tend to be narrowly focused, he added, but "with ukuleles, pretty much anything goes."

"This is the first time in well over 100 years that it's being taken seriously as a musical instrument," his wife added.

The couple also used the anniversary celebration as an opportunity to unveil the store's official mascot, the "ukalope," a ukulele version of the

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