

# Whiskey Hill bar loses its lease

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Whiskey Hill, a working-class bar in Watsonville with a long, colorful history and a bad reputation, has lost its lease.

The bar was one of the most visible landmarks from a time when the whole community of Freedom was called Whiskey Hill. The bar is on Freedom Boulevard at Green Valley Road, just inside the city limits.

On the spot where the bar stood until three weeks ago when it closed, there have been drinking places and dance halls for more than 100 years, local historian Betty Lewis said.

In the 1860s, there was even a pit for bear- and bull-fighting, Lewis said, a fairly common form of entertainment then.

The community changed its name to Freedom in 1877 when residents said they wanted "to get more civilized," Lewis said.

Mona Boyd, the bar's owner for the last two years, said she didn't know why the lease was not renewed. She has never spoken with the landlord, she said today, and wasn't given any reasons for the change.

The landlord, Rodney Juhl, inherited the building a couple of years ago from a cousin, Signe Schmidt, who had lived in Freedom for many years. Bruce Richardson, Juhl's attorney, said Juhl decided he didn't want to continue to lease to a bar, and that it had nothing to do with financial disputes or personal antagonism toward Boyd.

Boyd said she is looking for a new location to reopen, but hasn't



Mike McCollum

## Owner Mona Boyd and bartender Larry Hoelsing of the now-closed bar.

had much luck yet. She said she doubts she'll be able to find anything in the Watsonville city limits.

PIP Printing, next door to the bar, is talking with the landlord about renting the former bar and expanding. It has already hired a contractor to assess the project, employee Dan Carrillo said.

Larry Hoelsing, a bartender at Whiskey Hill for 12 years, is one of the seven employees who are now laid off.

"I'd like to have my job back," he said. "After 12 years, it's like getting evicted from your home."

Hoelsing and Boyd said the bar didn't deserve its reputation for being a tough biker bar. There were some bikers who were regular customers there, they said, but there were many regulars, and they all got along.

"Sometimes some outsiders would come in and start trouble," Hoelsing said. "The regulars had been coming in there for 12 or 15

years, and it was their bar. They took care of it. There were the normal little spats you'd get at any bar, friends getting drunk and getting mad at each other and having little fights."

Once, they said, a stranger got kicked out for getting drunk and making trouble, and he came back with a chainsaw, determined not to be locked out.

"He almost got through the door, but the blade snapped," Hoelsing said.