

# FIRE CONSUMES CLUB ZAYANTE



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Nick Jones holds his head as he watches his home at the former Club Zayante smolder Thursday morning. The storied nightspot is believed to have been built in the 1920s.

## Owner of storied landmark suffers severe burns

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*Historic Buildings*  
ZAYANTE — Club Zayante, once a popular nightspot tucked in the redwoods and known for its eclectic music, nude swimming and colorful regulars, went up in flames Thursday morning shortly before 8:30, ending the landmark's eight-decade existence.

Eighty percent of the log cabin-style lodge on East Zayante Road, across from the Zayante Creek Market and Deli, was consumed by the time firefighters arrived.

Tom Louagie, who closed the club years

**'Just knowing that the building and our friend were still there provided a sense of continuity.'**

**'BOOGIE' BRUCE ENGELHARDT, ONCE A REGULAR PERFORMER AT CLUB ZAYANTE**

ago but still lived on the property, suffered second- to third-degree burns on his hands and second-degree burns on his face, and was airlifted to a San Jose-area hospital, according to Zayante fire officials. His con-

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dition was not released late Thursday.

At least three others who rented rooms from Louagie escaped the fast-spreading blaze without injury.

Investigators did not immediately know the cause of the fire, but said it might have been ignited by a wood-burning stove. The stove sat in a common area once called "the living room of the San Lorenzo Valley" because residents would come down from Zayante's forested roads to meet out-of-town guests, gather around the fire or enjoy a steak and lobster dinner for the one-time

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price of \$3.25.

The retreat, after being open intermittently for years, closed to the public for good in 1983.

Residents fondly remembered it Thursday as an “underground country club” beyond comparison.

“It’s very sad because, even though it hasn’t been a club for some while, just knowing that the building and our friend were still there provided a sense of continuity,” said “Boogie” Bruce Engelhardt, who was once a regular performer at the club.

DJs at KPIG, the popular alternative radio station based in Watsonville, dedicated Thursday’s programming to the place known as “Club Z.”

The club was a launching ground for many local musicians and boasted an impressive roster of big-name performers.

John Lee Hooker once performed at the club on his birthday.

It was the favored West Coast club of Louisiana zydeco king Clifton Chenier. Ramblin’ Jack Elliot, Hot Tuna, Otis Rush, Mose Allison and R. Crumb and His Cheap Suit



Pete Amos/Sentinel file

Club Zayante is seen in December 1977.

Serenaders all broke through the quiet of the towering trees by playing here.

In addition to national headliners, the club had a stable of local performers, including Jill Croston, who played there before she gained widespread attention under the name Lacy J. Dalton.

Louagie bought the place in 1969 for \$36,000. The club, reportedly built in the 1920s as a storage shack for road-building equipment, came with a liquor license and furniture sitting in the bottom of the defunct pool.

Club Z endured a sometimes

rocky tenure over the next 14 years.

Before San Lorenzo Valley’s largely conservative demographic changed, Louagie said he put on a suit and went around introducing himself to neighbors, describing the place he wanted to create as posh but comfortable — something that would fit into the valley’s “straight” lifestyle.

But by the early ’70s, dues-paying members would relax in the club’s sauna after a long day of work, then jump into the pool, Louagie recalled in a 1977 interview. At first it was only at night,



Erik Colasanti/Special to the Sentinel

A fire Thursday morning burns the decades-old Club Zayante.

but the nude dips soon spread into the afternoons.

“Pretty soon, people started dropping in just for that, and many longtime visitors never even set foot inside the building,” he said.

A fire almost leveled the club in 1973. With no insurance to cover the loss, the club would have closed if not for friends donating time to help rebuild.

One year later, the club found itself in hot water. Neighbor complaints about the noise and nude

swimming began to pile up and the county Planning Commission nearly shut it down.

During the club’s heyday, it looked less like a nightclub than a peculiar artist’s dream: murals covered its outer walls with renderings of purple mountains and a large portrait of George Washington, lifted from the dollar bill.

In 1981, Louagie, a tall man with an engaging smile, reopened the club after a three-year hiatus before closing for good two years later.

On Thursday, firefighters found Louagie walking up East Zayante Road 30 minutes after they arrived. He was apparently unaware of the serious burns to his hands and head, said Zayante Fire Battalion Chief John Stipes.

The local chapter of the American Red Cross is accommodating at least two of the former residents with food, clothing and lodging, according to a spokeswoman.

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