

Cooper House bar, grill shut

Owners pull liquor license in dispute with developer over sale

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SANTA CRUZ — The off-again, on-again Cooper House bar and restaurant is off again.

The two businesses and the patio cafe closed last week after Steve Sanchez Jerome Jason, owners of the Oak Room bar and restaurant, told developer Brian Roeder they were taking back the Oak Room bar's liquor license in a business dispute.

Jason said the dispute involved negotiations on the sale of the bar and restaurant.

Roeder had been negotiating to buy the historic downtown landmark from Sanchez and his family, who purchased it from a San Francisco partnership in March 1986. Jason said negotiations for the bar and restaurant operation are separate from the building deal.

Sanchez also owns Anastacio's Restaurant in Santa Cruz.

Roeder, who had been managing

the new businesses since April under what Jason said is a temporary liquor license, reportedly came with trucks Thursday afternoon to remove furnishings — some of which Jason says he owns, and have been in the Oak Room for 13 years.

By Friday afternoon, the restaurant, the bar and the patio were bare, with nary a table umbrella in sight.

"He stripped the place — it's im-

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Cooper House

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possible for me to operate," Jason said.

Late Thursday night, the owners changed the locks on the building. Some store owners who arrived to work early Friday say they were locked out.

Sanchez declined to comment.

Jason said in a prepared statement that "Mr. Sanchez and I sincerely regret the harm to our other tenants, downtown merchants and the Cooper house patrons. We apologize to the community, residents and tourists alike who have enjoyed the Cooper House these sev-

eral years.

"We really didn't want this to happen. We now have to assess the damages and rebuild from here. Under advice of our counsel, we have no further comment at this time."

Aptos businessman Ray Roeder read a statement on behalf of his son that said, "Due to an unresolved dispute with the owners we are forced to once again shut down the fun and sounds, which are so much a part of summer in Santa Cruz."

"I don't typically resolve disputes with lawyers but in this case there was no other way.

"I wish we were still there ... I'll miss it. And no longer can you go to the restaurant and have a hamburger and listen to music outside."

In an April interview, Brian Roeder said that opening the patio so people could hear live music again was "like a dream come true." He said his family had spent many afternoons at the Cooper House in the 1970s.

The brick building on the Pacific Garden Mall served as the county courthouse from 1895 to 1967. It was remodeled as a shopping complex by developer Max Walden in 1971. The quaint brick building is known for its marble and wood steps, the outdoor patio and the art nouveau, beveled and stained glass facade over Mor-

row's Nut House, which was designed by local artisan Michael Leeds.

In the 1970s the Cooper House was "the" place to hang out on sunny days, sip a drink and listen to the soft jazz sounds of Warmth. The three stories' worth of trendy boutiques lured tourists inside.

Only five businesses remain in the once-bustling landmark. Some moved out last year, during a renovation of the Cooper House that lasted many months.

With the restaurant and live music gone, many shop owners were wondering how much longer they would last.

"The restaurant certainly brings in the tourists — and we did feel the effects of the restaurant's closing last fall," said Sue Winters, owner of Collage.

Gertrude Carmely, owner of a juice bar, said the owners changed the locks several times last year, failing to give shop owners keys.

"Right now, we can't get into our fuse boxes, because no one has a key," she said.

Some store owners, like Ronnie Saulls, pledged to stick it out.

"I'm staying," said the owner of Patti's Bloomers. "I have a large local clientele, and I'm sticking it out."



The band is gone from the Cooper House patio — and so are the tables and chairs.

Pete Amos/Sentinel

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