

Last call for rowdy Watsonville bar

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WATSONVILLE — Time has finally run out for the notorious Pasa Tiempo bar.

After four years of police investigations, legal proceedings and appeals, state officials posted a license revocation on the closed door of the lower Main Street hangout Thursday morning as employees cleaned the quiet interior.

The bar, whose name means "pastime," has served as an outpost for migrant workers, drug dealers, exotic dancers and gang members for two generations.

But owner Pete Sanchez Jr. said his fight to keep his liquor license has come to an end. He may not sell the license to anyone else, and no one may operate a bar in the building for at least a year. He has been charged with running a "disorderly house," and his final administrative appeal was denied 10 days ago in Sacramento.

Sanchez surrendered his liquor license to ABC administrator Lydia Eng-

dol around 9:30 a.m.

"I was going to take it (the case) to the District Court of Appeals, but I changed my mind," he told Engdol. "I'm just tired of it."

Sanchez said last year that he felt law enforcement officials were unfairly targeting his bar.

Pasa Tiempo security guard Andrew Chacanaca agreed.

"You guys finally got what you guys wanted," he said bitterly to a cluster of Watsonville Police Department and ABC officers after the sign posting, which was set up as a media event. "What about the other bars? You should be going after them."

"Yeah, we know," said ABC officer Carl DeWing. "We're going to."

In fact, another bar, La Frontera, will be closing its doors in October unless owner Armando Beltran is able to find a buyer before that time. The ABC has held off on revoking its license under the same charges — running a disorderly house — but has agreed to hold off on the revocation to give Beltran time to sell his business.

But the ABC is coming down harder on Pasa Tiempo, which was passed from original owner Pete Sanchez Sr. to his son when the agency threatened to revoke the father's license. The bar has been in the Sanchez family since 1972.

Bars used to line the streets in the South Main Street area, once dubbed "Sin City," a hub of illegal activity for the past 50 years.

Police chief Terry Medina reported 170 police calls to the Pasa Tiempo in 1994, a year that wasn't atypical. Sixty-two crimes were committed in or around the premises during that year, Medina said.

In 1981, three teens were arrested after they picked up a woman at the Pasa Tiempo Club, then drove her to a spot near the county fairgrounds and raped her.

And in 1984, a man was murdered in the bar during a shooting that apparently resulted from a feud that began in Mexico.

The bar's unsavory reputation was underscored Thursday morning when law enforcement officers drove up to

post the license revocation. There were two men sitting on a stoop behind the bar engaging in what appeared to be a drug transaction, according to Medina. One man was handing an item to the other man, which he quickly withdrew when he saw the police.

The closing of the bar is timely, given the city's investment in the run-down, crime-ridden area with \$720,000 of redevelopment money. Ramiro Romo, who owns Romo's Auto Sales, is borrowing the money to expand and move his car lot and build a Burger King at the corner of Main Street and Riverside Drive. And the city is creating a new turn lane to improve the traffic and appearance of the area, with plans to install a "Welcome to Watsonville" sign at one of the city's two key entrance points.

"We have people driving into town and they see people urinating on the sidewalk, fighting, drinking in public," said Watsonville police Lt. Manny Solano.

Chacanaca accused the city of taking advantage of the situation to take over Sanchez' property.