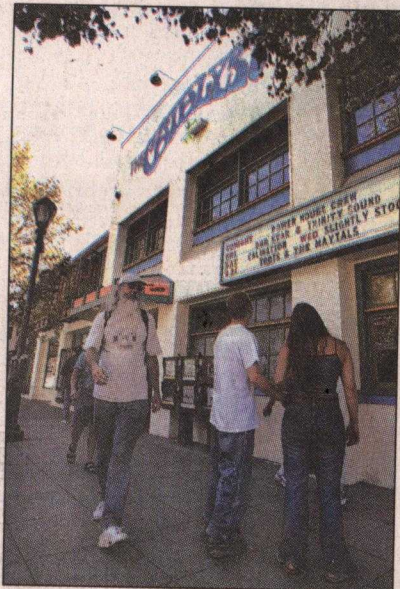


A couple stops to check the Catalyst marquee Thursday. Longtime owner Randall Kane is selling the club to a San Jose group.

Dan Coyro/
Sentinel



Historic S.C. music venue reported sold

Catalyst will be run by San Jose partners

By **DAN WHITE**
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SANTA CRUZ — The Catalyst, the cavernous old Pacific Avenue music hot spot that's hosted everything from gangsta rap to Wally's Swing World, appears to be changing hands.

The bookkeeper for The Spy nightclub in San Jose said Thursday that club's co-owner, David Farling, and its manager, Paul Gerhardt, bought the Catalyst last week.

"Yes, we acquired it," said the bookkeeper, who would not give her name. "It was in the works for months." She would not divulge a sale price.

The state liquor board on Thursday confirmed the same two men have filed for a new liquor license for The Catalyst. The paperwork was filed Wednesday.

However, none of the principals would return phone calls from the Sentinel, and Randall Kane, who bought the club in 1969, just two years after it opened, would not comment.

Marsha Ferguson, a state Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control investigator, said it would be highly unusual for new people to request a change



KANE
Has owned
Catalyst since
1969

See **CATALYST** on **BACK PAGE**

Catalyst

Continued from Page A1

of liquor license unless the business itself was on the verge of changing owners.

The names on the application should be familiar to Santa Cruzans who have been following the long negotiations for a Catalyst sale. Farling, a civil and business litigator, and Gerhardt are two of the men who were all set to buy the club from Kane in the spring of 2000 for a reported \$300,000.

But what appeared to be a done deal was not, in spite of the real estate broker's announcement at the time that "a lot of the major negotiations are behind us now."

The reasons for the three-year hold up were unclear Thursday.

Longtime Catalyst talent booker Gary "Bo" Tighe — who also books talent for the Spy club, formerly known as The Usual — insisted Thursday he'd heard no news about the status of the business.

He would only say that he gets a "flurry of calls every six months or so" from people curious about a rumored sale of the Catalyst.

The Spy Club and the Catalyst are very different creatures.

The Catalyst, a club, bar and restaurant, has an atmosphere like no other establishment in Santa Cruz. Some think of it as a place to try pick-up lines

Documents show Randall Kane is still the owner of record of the 19,000-square-foot building at 1011 Pacific Ave., where the Catalyst is located. In other words, Kane may be selling off the business but he's apparently sticking around as the landlord.

on strangers, check out punk and swing bands, learn salsa moves, quaff well drinks, and, if they're lucky, blow out their eardrums to the roaring feedback of Neil Young and Crazy Horse.

A casual atmosphere prevails with patrons who follow an anything-goes dress code, from the fancy shades, platform shoes and spangles of Superbooty concerts to the cowboy boots, beer belies and T-shirts at the KPIG Humbug Hoedown.

In contrast, the Spy Club is known for "industrial-espionage" style, sleek metal surfaces and neon lighting, along with an answering machine that lays out the dress code in blunt terms: "no beanies, no ball caps, no flannels, no sports attire. Just dress nice and make mama proud."

However, the bookkeeper in San Jose insisted Spy Club and the Catalyst won't be sister clubs.

"I don't know if they'll make any changes," she said. "They are trying to keep it much the same as it is right now. As far as I heard they're keeping the same booker. It shouldn't change

too much. The only thing they are looking to do is possibly add nights that are not regular nights for use."

Local documents show Kane is still the owner of record of the 19,000-square-foot building at 1011 Pacific Ave., where the club is located. In other words, Kane may be selling off the business but he's apparently sticking around as the landlord.

The club, when it was situated between Front Street and Pacific Avenue in the back of the St. George Hotel lobby, was once a meeting place for the city's scruffy hippie counter-culture, and catered to folk acts.

According to historian Carolyn Swift, the club has been a Santa Cruz mainstay since the days when "Dr. Timothy Leary was burbling about LSD." The founder was Al DiLudovico, who started it up in 1966 "in partnership with a handful of Santa Cruz merchants and UC Santa Cruz faculty," according to Swift.

The entrance was through a sliding door where "panes of wavy glass went up to the ceiling, and on the floor, thick

wood planks added to the mood of a 19th-century coffee shop," Swift wrote in a 2001 Sentinel article. Even now, it's full of eccentric touches — particularly the statue of Jesus playing electric guitar with a neon halo buzzing over his head, and the peculiar metal hand rising out from a counter top near the bar.

Kane, who is in his late 70s, is known as an outspoken and direct man with an eccentric side. He once ran, unsuccessfully, for City Council as an avowed Socialist and "autocrat," even while insisting he hated campaigning and saying, "I find the whole thing tiresome. I hate committees. I always figure I know best."

In 1976 Kane expanded and moved the club by transforming a former bowling alley into an 800-capacity 5,000-square-foot dance hall with balconies. Out front, patrons will find a deli counter and atrium cafe. Upstairs, there's pool, shuffleboard and pinball.

Kane insisted in 1991 that he never would retire and that the Catalyst is "the canvas I paint on."

But three years ago Kane announced he was selling the club. That announcement closely followed the state liquor board's decision, one month earlier, to suspend the club's liquor license for 20 days due to an "abnormal" number of police calls.

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