

Reaction to Boulder Club closure mixed

By TOM LONG
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BOULDER CREEK — The jukebox and bar are covered in clear plastic while painters revive the yellowed ceiling with fresh strokes of white. A bright red "Keep Out" sign is taped across the open doorway.

The notorious Boulder Club is closed.

Owners Jack and Fran Gualtier had their liquor license suspended for 20 days starting May 3. The state department of Alcoholic Beverage Control brought 13 sheriff's deputies to a hearing in late April to testify as to the club's rowdy nature. They also

brought tales of fights and drunkenness and minors being served in the bar, and a file folder full of complaints from Boulder Creek residents.

But despite the complaints, not everybody in Boulder Creek hates the Boulder Club. In fact, some of the club's closest neighbors either miss it or say they haven't noticed it being closed at all.

"It's hurt our business," says Robyn Vierra, owner along with her husband Terry of Boulder Creek Liquors, located next door to the bar. "We don't get as much traffic now."

"They never gave us any trouble at all," Vierra said. "They even brought over hot meals on holidays."

"Things have markedly improved there in the past year," says Terry Vierra. "I can't remember one fight in the last year."

Nancy McCarthy, owner of the Boulder Creek Book Company, which is on the other side of the bar, says its patrons have never given her any trouble.

"They have a different clientele," McCarthy says. "Skateboarders are a worse problem."

The Boulder Club has been a center of controversy in this mountain community for a number of years. Located on the bottom floor of the weathered Rex Hotel building, the club doesn't even have a sign announcing its ex-

istence. At different times it has been a hangout for bikers, blue-collar workers and tourists in search of a local watering hole. It has built up a regular local clientele over the years, but was accused of serving people who perform "unspeakable, disgusting acts" by one business leader last year at a community forum.

Despite the tough reputation, the Gualtieris have hosted potluck holiday dinners at the bar for the past 17 years, covering the pool tables with tablecloths and feeding whomever happens by. According to Christopher Smith, the Gualtier's attorney, both Jack and Fran Gualtier are in their late 60s.

Smith contends justice was not served at the hearing — it was blinded.

"Basically law-enforcement vigilantism has won out in Boulder Creek," Smith says. "The Businessman's Association up there does not like this bar. It was an example of the sheriff's department carrying out the wishes of the business association."

According to Smith, the Gualtieris had a choice between accepting the suspension or incurring high legal expenses while the string of deputies testified over a period he estimated might take two weeks.

"They had no choice but to

knuckle under," Smith said. "It was totally overkill."

In recent interviews some people in the town said that the club had become a scapegoat for whatever woes happen to afflict the community. But Bill Avey, district supervisor for the ABC, and the Sheriff's Office say the problems with the club are real enough.

"It not only has a reputation for being troublesome, it was well documented," says sheriff's Lt. Mark Tracey. "That's what led to this."

Indeed, an ABC undercover investigator documented nine incidents at the bar last May and June.

including fights, excessive drunkenness and loud music.

The shutdown will pass, of course. The Gualtieris could not be reached for comment, but the club is scheduled to reopen May 23.

"They'll be back just exactly the way they were, but they do have a violation in their records," says Avey. "It would be more serious the next time."

But Avey doesn't think there has to be a next time.

"They should observe their patrons," Avey says. "If they feel somebody's getting a little too much to drink, they should cut them off."

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