

Cooper House Merchants Talk

✓ 8-6-87-GT Cooper House

MERCHANTS in the Cooper House have gotten so tired of saying "I don't know" that they've ordered T-shirts with their answer to the most-often asked question at the Cooper House these days: "What's happening at the Cooper House?"

"We don't know," said Sue Winters, owner of Act V. "We haven't been told anything."

The restaurant and bar have been closed since July 22, when building owners Jerome Jason and Steve Sanchez pulled the liquor license in a dispute with Brian Roeder. Roeder was operating the bar and restaurant under the old liquor license while he and his father, Ray Roeder, negotiated the sale of the building.

Initially, neither side was willing to comment on why the deal went sour. But in a lawsuit filed Friday, Roeder has claimed that Sanchez and Jason raised the price they'd originally agreed on.

Jason and Sanchez in turn have accused Roeder of taking furnishings that they owned when he had the restaurant packed up, and are seeking \$250,000 in damages caused by disruption of business and \$50,000 for the items they say he took.

Roeder maintains that he took only what he owned and has filed a cross complaint for the return of \$75,000 in mortgage payments and outfitting of the restaurant and bar. Sanchez and Jason could not be reached for comment.

The Cooper House has been back on the market for about two weeks, according to agent Nance McKen-



Mari Anne Buckley of Act V: Her t-shirt says it all.

drick of Blickman-Turkus Co., who is handling the property. The asking price is \$2.5 million, she said.

Almost all of the current tenants of the Cooper House building say that their businesses have been adversely effected by the closure of the patio restaurant, and are hoping for a re-opening and a sale of the building soon.

But previous and current tenants alike agree that doing business in the Cooper House has been difficult for some time. They list the building's physical layout, problems with the current management, this year's ongoing construction and earlier problems with the bar and restaurant as the building's liabilities.

Despite the problems, they remain loyal to the building itself and hopeful that it can become functional again.

"We have a lot of loyal customers and our own entrance," said Ronnie Saulls, owner of Patti's Bloomers, explaining that her business hasn't been badly hurt by the recent problems. "I'm staying put." In the three years she's been in business, she said that she's observed a high turnover rate for the shops upstairs: "It's hard to get people just to walk upstairs. It's hard enough to get them inside a building."

"Business has been disastrous," said Jacqueline Capra, co-owner of Collage. "The last two weeks before they closed we were really beginning to do well — about \$200 or \$300 dollars a day — and now it's down to sometimes \$50 dollars a day."

Capra is encouraged by Blickman-Turkus taking on the building: "It look like things might make it better — I'm willing to stick it out and see what happens. It's a great building, one of the best places in Santa Cruz to shop."

Micki Pollack moved her shop, Rainbow's End, from the Cooper House last February. She had been upstairs in the Cooper House for 12 years and said that she moved because of the lack of management in

the building and the gradual ebb of shops from the second floor. "We were happy in the Cooper House, but it turned out that we were the last ones upstairs, and that wasn't good for business."

Joan Levine, owner of Camouflage, has been in her current mall location for three years. But she was upstairs in the Cooper House for five.

"It's really tough to make it in business upstairs because people just don't see you and walk by," Levine said she still did well because she had good clientele and an aggressive marketing program. She said she moved because she wanted a bigger location.

"It is not an easy place to do business out of," said Carmely, "but people came in. I had good foot traffic." Her juice bar has been in the building for over seven years, but she said that in the last year she's had ongoing problems with the way the building has been managed. She said that water and electricity bills have gone unpaid, that repairs are slow to be made, and that the tenants were often locked out of the building.

Carmely has given notice on her shop, saying that "business is lousy." Even so, she said she remains attached to the building, and hopes that it can be restored and returned to the thriving center it once was.

That Cooper House becomes functional again is a concern shared by more than the building's shop owners and their customers.

"The Cooper House is an essential feature of downtown and adds a lot to the ambiance of the area," said Rick Cuhn, executive director of the Downtown Association.

"I'm heartened by the fact that the owners — at least in the press, I haven't talked to them directly — have mentioned the downtown area and their concern for it," Cuhn noted. "I would hope that they'll act on that concern and facilitate, in any way they can, the re-emergence of the Cooper House as the central place of activity it really should be." •