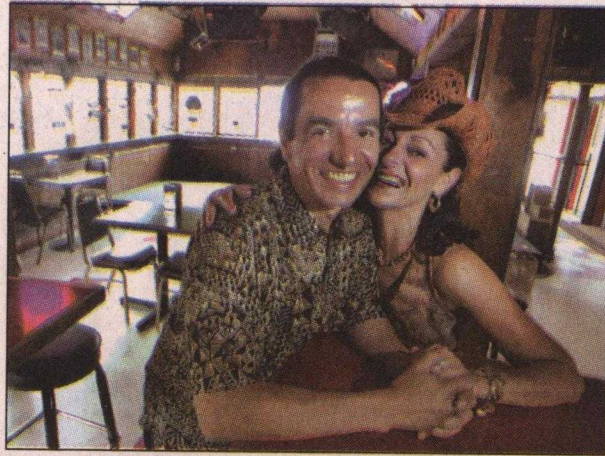


New owners
Caesar
Ramirez
and Sundi
Martinez
celebrate the
reopening
of Henfling's
Firehouse
Tavern in
Ben Lomond.

Bill Lovejoy/
Sentinel



Same Henfling's, new attitude

Bus H
✓ Ben Lomond
tavern back
in action with a
different appeal

By **GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

BEN LOMOND — For Harley riders dating sorority girls, Henfling's Firehouse Tavern in Ben Lomond is the new, hip place to go.

Pabst Blue Ribbon still flows through the tap. But bar manager Rand Coniglio serves up his signature Lemon Drops in candy-stripe-stemmed martini glasses.

7-24-05
Single malt scotches stand ready to pour. Thirty-two different tequilas sit poised for your favorite margarita.

Don't fret, the tavern hasn't turned too snobby — Toby Keith's "I Love This Bar" pumps through the speakers on a sunny afternoon.

It's just part of the new Henfling's atti-

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Henfling's

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tude, where owner Caesar Ramirez wants everyone to feel welcome.

After closing suddenly in January, Henfling's has reopened under new ownership.

Co-owners Ramirez and his wife, Sundi Martinez, are renting the space from the Henfling family for \$2,700 a month.

Many were glad to return to a landmark that has watered generations.

"Thank God it's open again. I've never seen such a pent-up demand for a bar in my life," said local Joe Beasley, looking up from his newspaper at an outside table.

Once known as a biker bar but more recently for its live music, Ramirez and Martinez want to diversify the crowd even more.

"Locals first, but it's everybody's bar," Ramirez said, repeatedly.

He hopes the guy who stops in for a beer after work will go home and bring his wife back for dinner.

To accomplish that goal, a shiny new finish coats the bar top. Patrons outside can order from the added service window. But cleanliness is the first thing many point out.

"It smelled like a urinal," Ramirez said of the pub before his new septic system. "That's not acceptable in my world."

Ramirez also had to deal with a kitchen full of food left when the bar closed six months ago — without refrigeration.

Now, he's added skirt steak in Bloody Mary sauce to a sandwich lineup of turkey burgers, veggie burgers, cheeseburgers and BLTs.

Specials change daily, and last week featured homemade meatloaf — of which kitchen manager Johnny Fever cooked 40 pounds.

"It's just old-fashioned cooking," Fever said.

The biggest challenge so far, Ramirez said, was the bureaucracy of closing escrow and dealing with the state Department of Alcohol Beverage Control.

Problems receiving a new liquor license repeatedly pushed back opening day, he said.

So far, he has invested \$150,000 of his own money in renovations, the liquor license, stock and inventory.

Now that he's in business, Ramirez plans to continue the bar's tradition of live music. The celebrated International Music Series has a new home at Don Quixote's in Felton, but Ramirez said he wants to feature local bands and the occasional big name.

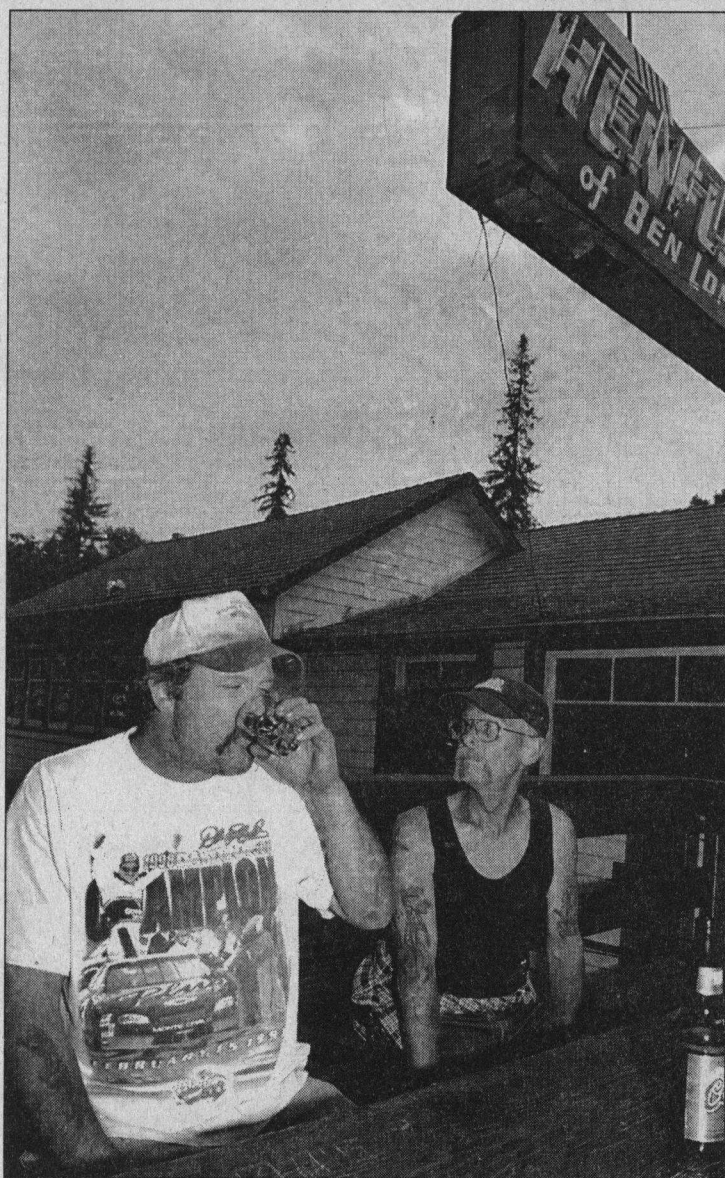
Most concerts, he said, will carry no cover charge. Sunday will be blues — and football; Ramirez plans to install a big screen television and subscribe to a sports broadcasting package.

He and Coniglio said it's all in honor of original owner Frank Henfling, whose photo sits above the bar.

The two men have 47 years of service experience between them, with Coniglio opening many county hot spots (like Don Quixote's and Costa Brava in downtown Santa Cruz) and Ramirez selling wine for decades.

But the duo strives for the high regard the community holds for Henfling.

"If people will remember us as much as they remember him, then we'll be a success," Ramirez said.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Marc Alexander and Alan Hannaleck enjoy an afternoon libation at the reopened Henfling's in Ben Lomond on Thursday.



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