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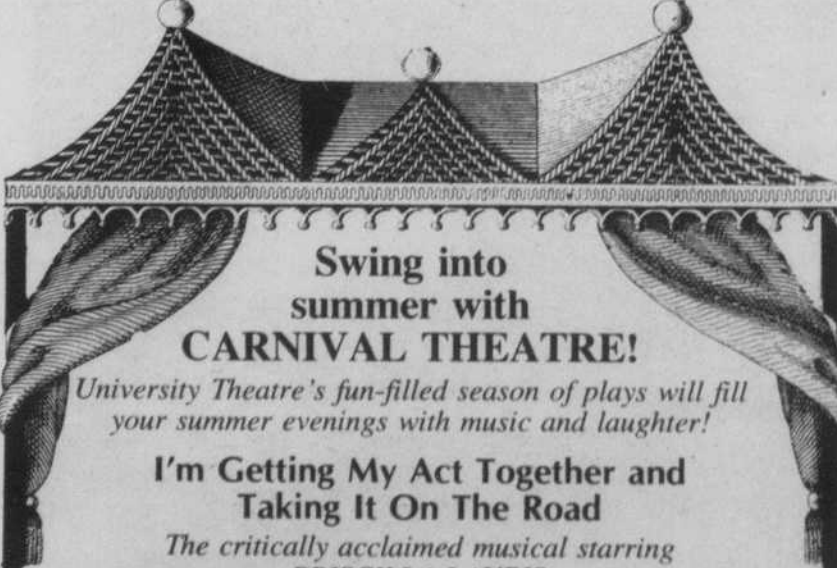


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It's hot tubs, not cold suds

By Cort Fernald
Of the Emerald

For more than 10 years the club now known as B.J. Kelly's has been a popular campus watering-hole.

University students could count on three things at B.J. Kelly's: cold beer, live music and an atmosphere conducive to meeting the opposite sex. When the pressures of becoming "educated" got to be almost too much to bear, an evening's recreation at B.J. Kelly's offered just the tonic to rejuvenate textbook-weary students.

But all this has passed into the memory books. Two weeks ago Doug Lee, the present owner of B.J. Kelly's, closed down the club and held a liquidation sale. On Friday, Lee confirmed the persistent rumors that B.J. Kelly's would be transformed from a night club to a health club.

B.J. Kelly's opened under the name Murphy's in 1972. Duffy's, which closed its doors last year, and The Paddock both opened that year, also. Lee says that at the time there were only a few liquor licenses in Eugene, so B.J. Kelly's was a viable enterprise.

But since 1972, Lee has seen competition increase with liquor licenses granted to "every mom and pop grocery store" and the University's weekly beer gardens.

Not only was B.J. Kelly's competing for liquor sales, they also were competing with the Hult Center for the Performing Arts for a share of the entertainment dollar. According to Lee, that share was shrinking and shrinking.

"Put entertainment on top of that (liquor sales) for this size of a room and it's a gamble," Lee says.

"The music industry wasn't viable financially to keep us going," Lee says. The last four months B.J. Kelly's decided to book national acts such as Los Angeles' The Three O'Clock, Jonathan Richman and San Francisco's The Dinosaurs. Many people in the community were glad B.J. Kelly's was making an attempt to bring up-and-coming national music acts to Eugene.

But the national acts weren't entirely successful.

"We had to give it a go," Lee says, with a measure of frustration. "You can't just sit back." Lee can't say whether they actually made or lost money in the last four months.

The response of the community toward the entertainment and the general economic climate of Eugene contributed to Lee's decision to turn B.J. Kelly's into a health club.

"Entertainment wasn't supported by the community," he says. "The economy is hurting in Eugene. The money's just not there."

Also, recent state and national legislation implicating tavern owners in criminal charges involving drunk-driving accidents turned Lee away



Photo by Michael Clapp

Patrons of the former B.J. Kelly's will get a towel, not a beer, when working up a sweat after the building is turned into a health spa.

from night club ownership. With the closing of the night club, Lee has given up its liquor license.


But most of all Lee says it was health — mental, physical and financial — that swayed his decision to change B.J. Kelly's.

Lee plans to add 2500 square feet onto the building on Franklin Boulevard and transform what was once a night club designed for drinking, dancing and live music into a bona fide health club. The club will boast a weight room, locker rooms, spa, suntan booths and an aerobics area.

"We're waiting to finalize the plans with rates and everything," Lee says. That plan will be formally announced this week, he says.

The club also is developing a package that accepts both memberships and drop-ins, he says.

That plan and final construction of the health club should be something to marvel at. Imagine sitting in a hot tub where not a few months earlier dancers had been jumping to a hot band.



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