Bars pick up slack from Taylor's

By Pat Malach
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When the door of Taylor's Tavern swung closed earlier this summer, it left many people standing outside wondering what will happen to the local blues scene and the building that used to be its home.

The well-used building at the corner of 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street, has been serving food, beer and the town's best known blues to University students since the early seventies. The bar had attracted nationally known blues acts including Grammy Award-winner Robert Cray.

After filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy at the beginning of June, tavern owner Dave Dingman turned out the lights for the last time on July 10.

"I didn't really know I was going to close it until a couple of days before it happened," Dingman said. "I had an investor interested in coming in, but the deal fell through."

The locked doors of the tavern took Rodney Taylor, the man whose family has owned the building since 1930, by surprise as well.

"I didn't know until Tuesday," he said. "I came back from the coast and heard the place was closing." Taylor said he got the news form one of his sons who had been at the tavern and heard the announcement. "They kept announcing (at the tavern) that it was closing. I guess they had a real ball in there.

"It was always busy at night," he said, reflecting on why the business may have failed. "(Dingman) is a nice guy. He just wasn't making ends meet so he walked away."

Dingman cited several reasons for his decision to leave the business. He said he felt the building owners did not want to re-lease the structure as a tavern and with the lease coming up soon he thought it was time to get out.

Dingman also said the building's size and lack of potential for growth limited his opportunities to cover his debts.

"You know how big the building was. There was no way to grow, and I had a lot of contracts to pay," he said. "It was a job. I wasn't making any headway or moving forward."

"I had a good time there," Dingman said. "It was a fun six years, but it was time to move on. Someone can make a living there, but they're not going to get rich."

Allegations that mismanagement was a cause for the failure of the business have been raised by lawyers for D.A.P. Investments, the middle men between the Taylors and Dingman.

Attorney Wilson Mulheim said Dingman's internal auditing system made it impossible to tell how much money the business was making. He added that because Dingman kept most of the cash on the premises and did not make daily deposits, it was difficult to account for the daily receipts.

"If there is no control of the cash you don't know if your employees are robbing you blind or if the owner is taking it out of the till," Mulheim said. "You can't accuse anybody because you have no proof."

Mulheim also said there was no accounting for tips received by employees and payroll taxes had not been paid in a timely manner.
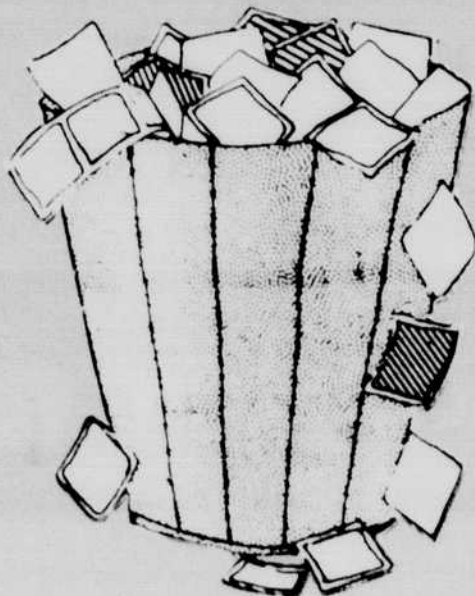
"They're trying to dig up all the dirt they can," Dingman responded. "The people making those allegations have never been in the building."

Former operations manager for Taylor's Tavern, Gavin "Rooster" Fox declined to comment on the financial aspect of the business, saying that it was Dingman's department. But he did say the overall management of the tavern was "on the up and up."

"All of our dealings with musicians were straight

File Photo

Taylor's Tavern, the popular student hangout and blues bar just off campus, closed its doors July 10.