

Closure means unhappy new year for Wild Duck

Owner Bob Jensen says the costs were too high to keep the restaurant, brewery and stage open

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

The Wild Duck Brewery, Restaurant and Music Hall closed its doors on Jan. 1 after it was unable to keep up with costs in the poor economy.

The popular venue, located at 169 W. Sixth Ave., was one of Eugene's outlets for funk, reggae, jazz and soul music.

"We couldn't take the beating any longer," the Wild Duck's booking agent Brendan Relaford said. "It was really a cascade of things. The continuing elevation of minimum wage mixed with the size of the building. An audience that would pack most the places in Eugene would hardly fill us. We were too big."

"The minimum wage increase was the cornerstone of it," Wild Duck owner Bob Jensen said. "Our insurance has also doubled in the past few years, partly because some insurance companies are getting rid of high risk forms of insurance like liquor liability, which we need to have. We used to have 26 possible carriers; in the end we were down to about two."

Along with the rising costs of

operating, the Wild Duck also faced the problem of an anemic downtown culture that had never become as thriving as local businesses had hoped. Even opening the three blocks of Broadway between Oak and Char-nelton Streets in September 2002, changing them from a pedestrian walkway into an open street, did not do much to help business.

"The original idea was that the Wild Duck would contribute to and feed off of the business from downtown," Flying Ink Media publicist Douglas Fuchs said. "But many of the larger businesses, like Symantec and The Register-Guard, left downtown. The opening of Broadway didn't seem to help."

Even without any steady crowds from Eugene's downtown, the Wild Duck was still a popular night spot, especially during its first few years.

"When we first opened in 1996 it was like a machine," Relaford said. "We were packed a lot."

The Wild Duck hosted a number of acts that went on to become Eugene favorites. Bands such as Left-over Salmon, Spearhead, Los Lobos, Dark Star Orchestra, the String Cheese Incident, the Wailers, Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers, the Grey Boy Allstars and David Crosby all performed on the Duck's stage while traveling up and down the Interstate-5 corridor. Eugene locals,



Danielle Hickey Senior Photographer

Economic troubles forced the Wild Duck Brewery, Restaurant and Music Hall to close its doors Jan. 1.

such as The Cherry Poppin' Daddies and Shelley James Musicbox, also performed at the venue. James and her band, who played on New Year's Eve, were the last performers on the Wild Duck's stage.

"The diversity of the performances really fit with the Eugene community," Jensen said.

Despite the closing of the Wild Duck

itself, its production organization, Big Green Events, will remain intact. The company has managed events as varied as Art & the Vineyard to the Springfield Filbert Festival. Wild Duck Catering and the Mallard Banquet Hall will also remain in business. Jensen says the company doesn't have plans to open another club anytime soon.

"I wouldn't say a comeback is im-

possible, but I wouldn't say it's likely either," Jensen said.

As for the Wild Duck building itself, the company has received offers for renting it as retail or office space, but as of this writing, no plans are certain.

Contact the senior Pulse reporter at ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com.

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Visit to Israel reveals opposing images

A recent trip to Israel uncovers a sense of danger that is real but distant

By Steven Neuman
Freelance Reporter

If you could travel halfway around the globe, beyond comfortable Western Europe — beyond Eastern Europe, beyond the Mediterranean — to spend ten days in one of the most politically volatile regions in the world, a place most Americans only see on CNN, what would you walk away with? For me, it was a totally new perspective.

PART 1 OF 2

Today: The perceived danger of traveling to Israel and its cultural impact on an American traveler
Next week: A look at the Israeli perspective of America

I flew to New York, boarded a 747 packed with other college students and braved a 10.5-hour direct flight to

Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel. A week and a half later, I handed my passport back to U.S. customs, along with seven rolls of undeveloped film and a notebook crammed with notes packed away in my suitcase.

When I mention where I went in passing conversations, the first question I'm usually asked is: "Isn't it dangerous there?" This is something that I cannot completely explain, because before I had actually

been there, I also found it nearly impossible to grasp how people could bring up children, go to work, and lead everyday lives in the face of such persistent threats.

Israel is a country at perpetual war. So obviously it can be very dangerous there. Our group had two armed guards with us at all times. But from my perspective, it is not a country that actually feels particularly dangerous.

What I found amazing is that the people of Israel have not hardened



Steve Neuman Freelance Photographer

Road signs are written in three languages: Hebrew (the national language), Arabic and English.

themselves to death, warfare and destruction, as one would expect. The attitude is similar to the approach of a quintessential Manhattanite who doesn't necessarily debate that New York City is dangerous (you might get mugged, shot, etc.), but chooses not to think about the danger — the possibility of a

bomb exploding anywhere, or the country coming under attack, for example — occurring on a day-to-day basis.

In both cases, the danger is very real, but simultaneously distant. For the first five days, we saw little evidence of ter-

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