

Its future seems less precarious now, but a Portland gay bar's newfound stability has not come without a price.

On Jan. 10, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission approved a settlement with Steve Suss, owner of the Embers Avenue, a popular club in Old Town that has been wrapped in controversy the past few months.

The Embers is located at 110 N.W. Broadway.

Citing "repeated serious and persistent problems of fights, assaults, large unruly crowds and intoxicated customers," the OLCC suspended the establishment's liquor license Sept. 14.

The OLCC's mission is to regulate the sale, distribution, and "responsible use of alcoholic beverages in order to protect Oregon's public health, safety and community livability."

The suspension notice included the commission's proposal to permanently cancel the license, which could have effectively put the Embers out of business.

In response to the immediate suspension, Suss met with representatives from the OLCC, Portland Police Bureau and city of Portland to discuss the matter and submitted a plan to OLCC addressing its concerns.

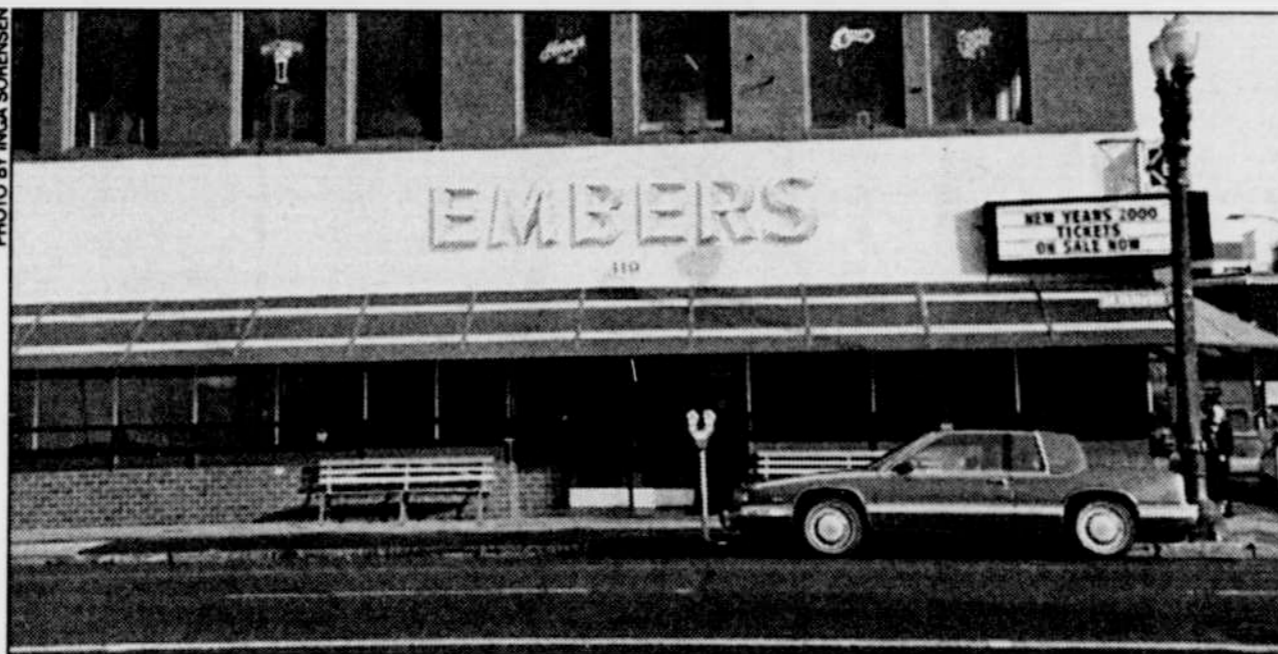
On Sept. 29, the OLCC lifted the immediate license suspension after Suss made numerous concessions to get his business open again.

Those compromises included greatly scaling back the number of patrons that could be in the club at any one time, limiting alcohol sales and assigning more security guards to be monitors, as well as complete background, reference and criminal record checks of prospective employees.

Suss' plan was enough to lift the immediate suspension, but the proposed cancellation of his

STEADYING THE SHIP

It looked like sink or swim time for the Embers Avenue—swim it is if all goes according to plan by Inga Sorensen



Embers Avenue is still advertising New Year's Eve on its marquee—must be the Y2K bug

license remained intact. He had until Dec. 14 to contest OLCC's proposal by requesting an administrative law hearing to try and halt the final order from taking effect.

But it didn't come to that. The parties hammered out a settlement that requires Suss to accept a 30-day suspension or pay a civil penalty of \$1,950. If Suss opts to pay the civil penalty, he has until 5 p.m. Jan. 21 to do so. If he chooses to serve the suspension, it begins 7 a.m. Jan. 26 and ends 7 a.m. Feb. 25.

Suss did not return *Just Out's* phone calls,

and at press time the OLCC had not yet been informed of his decision.

According to the agreement, Suss must also comply with the terms of the plan he submitted that led to the Sept. 29 lifting of the immediate suspension.

Additionally, if another major incident occurs involving the club, the Embers must agree to stop selling alcohol at 12:30 a.m. (The club currently can sell alcohol until 2:30 a.m.) The deal stipulates that "if no such incident occurs within one year of January 23, 2000, this

portion of the settlement agreement will expire on that date."

The Embers could be dubbed a "Queer Cheers." Drag shows are a mainstay attraction, and the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court has congregated there for decades, holding most of its events at the roomy site, which features five full bars, a large hardwood dance floor, a mirrored catwalk overlooking the main floor, and high-tech lighting.

For a time, the spot served as home to Esther's Pantry, which assists people living with HIV/AIDS.

During the early years, the Embers drew a primarily gay clientele. Folks would watch the drag shows or relax with a beer.

"I'm a gay man, always have been, never wanted to be anything else," Suss told *Just Out* back in September.

"I turned [the Embers] gay on March 24 at 8 a.m. I remember it clearly," he said of that moment 28 years ago.

In recent years, however, an increasingly heterogeneous and rowdy mix has poured into the club, and sporadic violence in or near the Embers has become a problem that OLCC officials have dubbed "a very critical situation."

In an effort to keep the club out of trouble, Suss has, among several other concessions, agreed that security personnel will "conduct frequent random patrols" of the area immediately surrounding the Embers Avenue, any and all drink specials will be eliminated, and a breathalyzer machine will be purchased.

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