

NEIGHBORS REMEMBERED

It was Friday night and the place was packed. Ballads and dance hits from the one and only Cher blared from the stage. The drag performance group SHEBANG performed the last of six years' worth of performances at their favorite venue. Sorority girls and buzzed-cut older women chatted about the music in line for the bathroom. This kind of night was what made Neighbors Bar and Bistro an institution in Eugene, and not just for the gay community.

First and foremost, Neighbors was a hate-free zone, as anyone associated with the nightclub will tell you. It was a place where a frat boy and a drag queen could rub elbows, enjoying the effervescent beauty that was 50-cent Pabst night. But as of last Saturday, Neighbors is no more, and many Eugeneans have lost more than just a place to grab a drink.

"Neighbors (was) a community centerpiece," says Alan Brown, president of the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Emerald Empire, a nonprofit fraternal organization that hosted fund-raisers at Neighbors. "We don't have a gay and lesbian newspaper. It (was) a place you could go and get community information."

Besides being an informal forum for the GLBTQ community, Neighbors served as a spot where heterosexuals, especially students, could feel comfortable while being exposed to a different culture.

"I have seen so many barriers knocked down there," says Karen Luna, a regular customer and a manager at Mother Kali's Bookstore. "People go there for the novelty and realize it is a whole new community. It is the kindest bar I've been to in Eugene."

As of now, there are no plans to reopen Neighbors at another location, only rumors upon rumors. But this could change. Owner Cindy Hill hasn't had much time to get her business in order after the property owner's 30-day notice to vacate the premises. — *Tim O'Rourke*

WOW HALL EYES BACK LOT DEAL

The WOW Hall gets a steady stream of big acts coming through Eugene week in and week out, but with no backstage area these performers either have to hang out in their vans or buses or squeeze into the closet-sized Green Room across from the stage. That could change if WOW Hall supporters raise enough money to purchase the parking lot behind the building.

A group calling itself the Backlot Committee, which includes past and present WOW Hall board members, started a fund-raising drive called More WOW Now, whose present goal is to raise enough money to purchase the lot for \$55,000. In 1977 a community group bought the WOW Hall itself for only \$75,000.

More WOW Now has a goal of \$100,000 that would go to the purchase and improvement of the lot and start the ball rolling on a

backstage addition. So far, \$17,000 has been raised, with more than \$7,000 coming from contributions and \$10,000 from a TicketWeb.com pledge.

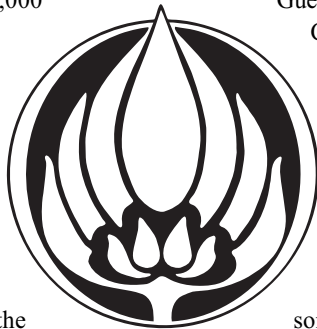
The Backlot Committee sent out a direct-mail solicitation asking present and former WOW Hall members to contribute funds, and in the next few weeks will begin appealing to local businesses. If the committee can't raise enough money the Country Fair has offered to loan the WOW up to \$30,000, and they could also

borrow from the WOW's own reserve fund. "We'd rather not do this," said Denny Guehler, a member of the Backlot Committee. "Raising the funds from the local community will enhance our progress greatly."

Regardless of how the funds are gathered, the WOW Hall will buy the lot from the city in April or May. The city's offer is reasonable, says Guehler, and Metropolitan Affordable Housing Corporation, the non-profit group in charge

of redeveloping the property of the former Ridenour building next door to the WOW, could foot the bill for repaving the WOW parking lot and constructing a new drainage system.

After the parking lot is bought, paid for and renovated, the Backlot Committee will continue its plans to add on to the hall itself. The plans call for extra storage space in the basement area and a lift so the beer garden is wheelchair accessible. An L-shaped addition would add a backstage area jutting out into what is now the back lot, which would include a green room, dressing rooms and bathrooms for performers. — *Tim O'Rourke*



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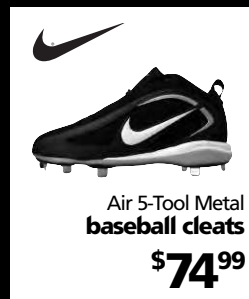
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