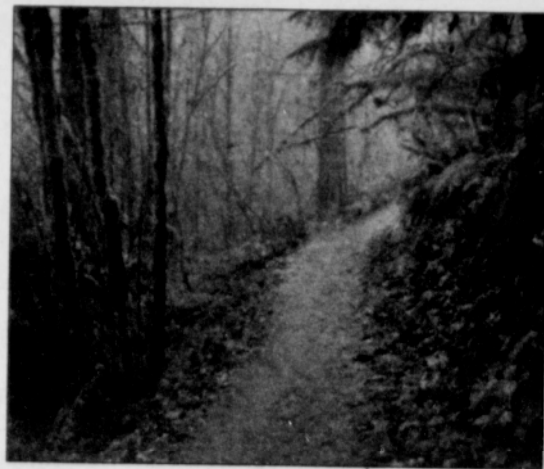


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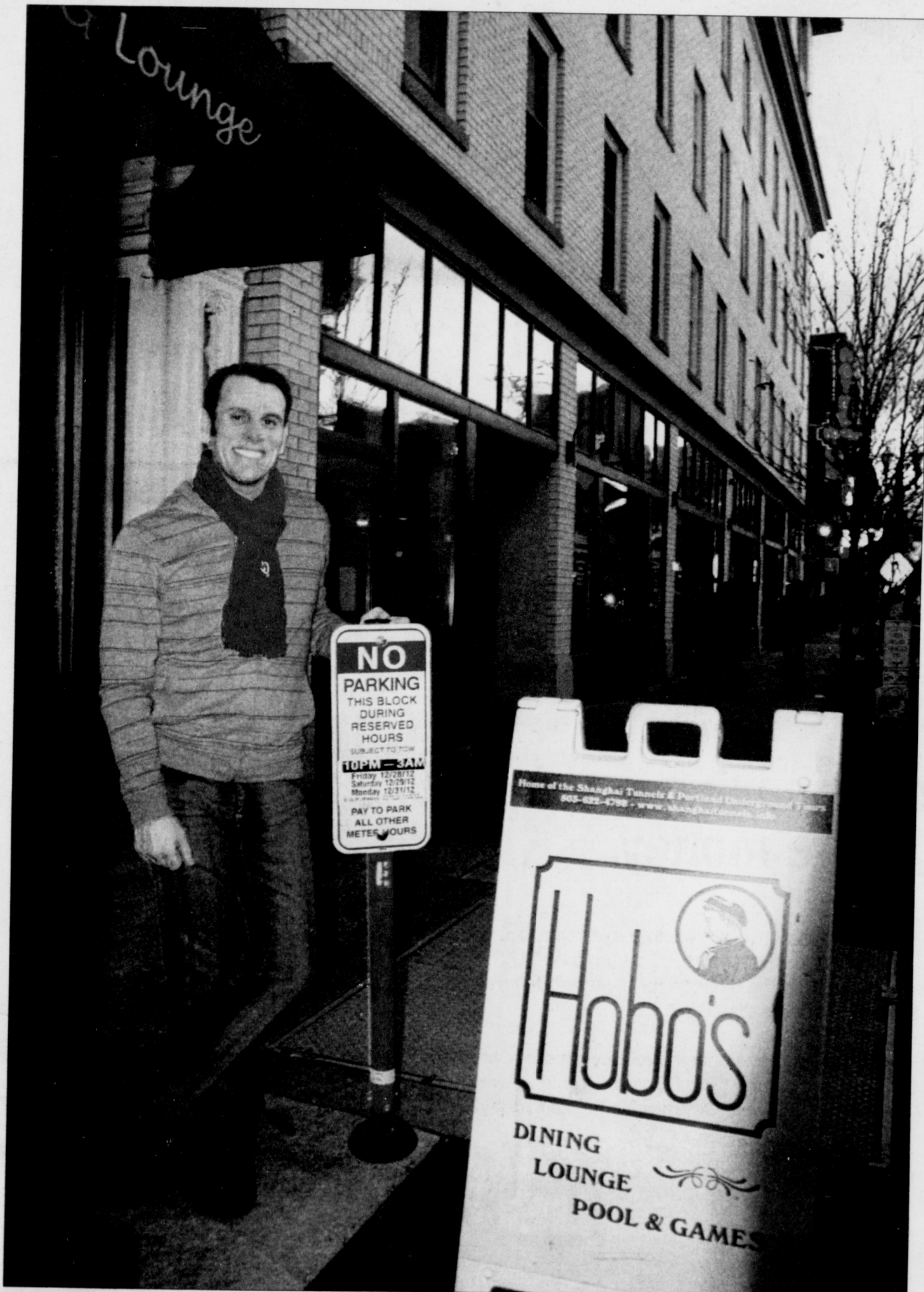


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Crowd Control

Overflow club scene transforms Old Town

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Hobo's restaurant and lounge first opened more than 25 years ago on Northwest Third Avenue in the Old Town/Chinatown district, it was among many places to dine in the neighborhood.

Now, the scene has changed. In the past decade, food-oriented businesses have given way to late night bars and clubs that offer patrons loud, D.J. thumping dance music into the wee hours of the morning.

On any given weekend, large crowds of party-goers come from all corners of the metro area and fill the downtown venues, sidewalks and streets whilst looking for cheap drinks and good, albeit drunken, times.

Recently, the flood of pedestrians, while profitable for the area's mostly liquor-serving businesses, has bumped elbows with cars, other pedestrians, and police. Law enforcement reported an escalating numbers of safety and traffic violations from sidewalk fights to vehicle-on-pedestrian accidents.

"It was a zoo down here," said Andrew Guthrie, Hobo's general manager, who has watched customers come and go in the area for more than twenty years. "Especially on Couch and Third, that is just chaos on a Friday night around midnight or one in the morning."

Beginning with the New Year, police have begun enforcing the city's decision to close streets to vehicular traffic from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. on Friday and Saturday evenings, as well as major holidays, like New Years Eve. Closures will continue for a three-month trial ending April 1.

The closures span a four-block grid between Northwest Second and Fourth avenues from West Burnside Street to Northwest Couch and Davis Street. Northwest Third Avenue is also closed between Everett and Burnside.

Any vehicles remained parking within that area after 10 p.m. are subject to tow, according to the police bureau's press release. Streets and sidewalks in the area will be established as pedestrian-only, with exception of defined taxi and pedicab zones. New street and parking signs have been installed to notify to the public.

Talks on the issue began several months ago and included local community members and business

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Hobo's General Manager Andrew Guthrie has watched customers come and go in the Old Town/Chinatown area for more than 20 years. He's taking a wait-and-see attitude on the logic behind closing streets on weekend nights to abate the bumping and shoving from crowds of people jamming the streets and sidewalks around area bars and dance clubs. "We will see if it works," he said.