

Thinking out loud

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The Tiki Hut at Lake Keowee Marina in Seneca has found itself at the center of debate surrounding revisions to Oconee County's noise ordinance, although county councilman Paul Cain says that was not the intent of the proposed ordinance.

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Tiki Hut owner aiming to tone down live music GM: 'We want to be great neighbors'

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The general manager of The Tiki Hut at Lake Keowee Marina says the club has taken measures to keep its live music from being a neighborhood menace.

Those measures include agreeing not have live entertainment after midnight, as well as installing "sound-baffling" materials under the stage and putting up a sail to cover the deck where bands play to help contain the noise.

When Jim Bennett came to the club in February, he says he learned it had a problem renewing its li-

quor license with the S.C. Department of Revenue due to noise complaints.

At a hearing in Columbia recently, Bennett said a judge had ruled The

Tiki Hut could renew its license, but said the bar "put in some stipulations on our own to make it palatable to the local people around here."

The issue became a talking point in Oconee County when council member Paul Cain proposed an amendment to the county's noise ordinance that would allow for concerts in unincorporated areas.

Gary Littlefield, who sits on the board of zoning appeals and lives near The Tiki Hut at Lake Keowee Marina, spoke during public comment and said the bar is a habitual offender of the county's noise ordinance.

Littlefield suggested the ordinance offered the county a chance

to crack down on such issues.

He cited a Freedom of Information

'I want us all to get along, and since I'm the new kid on the block, I want to do everything that I can to make this work for both of us.'

Jim Bennett
The Tiki Hut owner

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TIKI HUT: Owner concerned about ordinance

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Act request he made to the OCSO showing that since Jan. 1, 2007, sheriff's deputies had visited the bar "for various reasons, but primarily noise" 280 times, admitting he had made some of those calls himself.

Bennett said he saw an article in The Journal regarding Cain's proposed amendment to the county's noise ordinance and admitted the club was concerned about a negative impact on its business.

"I've met with Gary on several occasions, and I said, 'We want to be great neighbors. I want us all to get along, and since I'm the new kid on the block, I want to do everything that

I can to make this work for both of us,'" he said.

Administrator Scott Moulder said at the June 16 meeting he did not believe the intent of the ordinance was to restrict businesses such as The Tiki Hut, but instead to allow for open-air concerts.

"It just depends on where council wants to fall," he said. "If we just want to provide an opportunity for music to be heard, we can lessen this down. If you want to try to limit their ability to have more than they should in a year, we can tighten it up."

Bennett said among the stipulations that allowed The Tiki Hut to renew its license were that the noise level would be no

more than 85 decibels and that it would install "sound-baffling materials" underneath the stage.

In addition to the stipulations, Bennett said the club is putting up a sail to cover the deck where bands play and help contain the noise.

"So it will resist the sound from traveling all over the place because it will contain the whole of the facility, where the bands are," he said.

Bennett said the bar is having its employees undergo training on proper procedures for serving alcohol responsibly, as well as agreeing not to have live entertainment after midnight.

"So we put that on our-

selves, and that was in the stipulations," he said.

Bennett said the club typically has bands until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays and then "only acoustic-type music" on Sundays. He said the club also has karaoke night from 7-10 p.m. on Thursdays, which he described as "low key."

"So there's not a lot of problems here anymore," he said. "I understand that (with) previous managers it got a little bit out of hand. That is not going to happen."

Bennett admitted even as recently as Saturday, rain had forced the scheduled band — the Derrick Dorsey Band — to begin its show a half-hour late.

impacting business

"They are a very low-key band," he said. "They are like a country band, very well known in the area ... and because they started half an hour late, they thought they should play a half an hour later — which was a big mistake, because we had the Oconee sheriff's office here at 12:30."

Bennett said the club was in the wrong and "the ball got dropped."

"That will never happen again," he said. "I can guarantee you that."

Bennett said he doesn't

believe The Tiki Hut, which has a capacity of 200 seats, can be construed as having a concert whenever a band performs at the club.

"We're just really concerned that this is going to negatively impact our business," he said. "This is like a landmark here. It's a great place for tourism to promote Seneca, and I'd just feel horrible about this if it goes the wrong way."

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