

Bar owner responds to what he calls "death sentence" given by the city following video of lewd acts

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Chris Keidel owns the Bottle and Barrel bar, located at 554 E. Broadway in Alton.

Recently, that bar was condemned by the city to 15 consecutive days of closure starting and ending on dates of Keidel's own choosing, and an original fine of \$750, which was dropped to \$500. The reason for that punishment - called a "death sentence" to smaller establishments like Keidel's - is a video posted to social media showing a topless woman dancing in the upstairs portion of Keidel's establishment.

Keidel does not attempt to deny what the video showed. He rented the entire building for the use of a birthday party on Saturday, Oct. 21, 2017. He said the party paid him enough to rent the entire building and pre-purchased \$2,500 worth of liquor. He also

said the unnamed party provided security for the event before bringing just short of 150 people into the establishment.

While Keidel was in the bar for the entirety of the party, he said he was not aware of any lewd acts occurring on the premises, saying he thought the party concluded without a hitch until seeing that video posted to Facebook. That video has since been removed from social media.

"I'm not sure how she received that video, or who took it," Keidel said of the person who posted it. "I haven't seen the entire video. I saw a few minutes of it. It started with a woman dancing - fully clothed - but then another woman turned around and had her breasts exposed. That's when I turned it off."

Following that viewing, Keidel said he immediately contacted Alton Mayor Brant Walker via text at 3:17 p.m. that following Monday, Oct. 23. He asked the mayor to call him, and Walker did return that call the following morning just before noon. Keidel said neither party could speak for long, but agreed to meet regarding the incident in the near future.

That next Thursday, Oct. 27, Keidel said the mayor's secretary contacted him and scheduled a meeting for Halloween afternoon. Keidel brought his attorney to the meeting, which he said included the mayor and the city's legal counsel, Jim Schrempf.

He said neither party wanted the issue to "go away," saying he admits a certain level of responsibility and fault in the matter, but added he was shocked when the city leveled the 15 consecutive days of closure punishment on him.

"They allowed me to choose the beginning of those days, but that was all," Keidel said. "I tried negotiating with them and my attorney, and they would not budge on those days. We were able to get the fine dropped from \$750 to \$500, but that was it."

When asked what a more acceptable punishment would have been, Keidel said 15 or more non-consecutive days would have been more fair. He said he did not blame the mayor, nor the city for what he viewed as an extreme punishment. Keidel feels like he is being made into an example of the city being tough on bars engaging in such behavior, but he believes what happened in his establishment did not warrant that action - especially when compared to other places in the area.

"There are places around here where people have been shot and stabbed that got punished less than I did," Keidel said Monday afternoon. "How are exposed breasts worse than shootings and stabbings?"

Keidel said his attorney advised him challenging the punishment would require him going to court with another lawyer, and Keidel admitted he did not want to go through that process.

He still feels as if he has been made into a sacrificial lamb or collateral damage in order for the city to prove a point that it is tough on misbehaving bars, after so many have been given leniency for past mistakes. Despite that, he said he does not blame the mayor, nor anyone in the city. He did say he wishes the person who posted the video had not done it on Facebook.

"I wish she would have contacted me about it first, before putting it on blast," Keidel said. "The fact it was all over Facebook like it was probably forced the city's hand. If it were not put on Facebook, it probably would have been more manageable."

So, Keidel has accepted his given punishment, and chose to be closed from Nov. 26 - Dec. 11. He said that would allow him some time to host events, get through the infamous Thanksgiving Eve and possibly rally the community together in support of the Bottle and Barrel.



"I chose Alton, I love Alton, now Alton has to decide if they want to choose me," Keidel said. "Plan B is not located in Alton."

Currently, he estimated his monthly expenses at \$8,000. He said this closure, despite being in a slower time of year when people are saving for the upcoming holidays, would cost him roughly that much money. He described his establishment as a day-to-day bar, meaning he relies on each day's income to sustain him.

After he reopens in December, Keidel said he will need an additional \$1,000 to renew his liquor license on Dec. 31.

Given these expenses, 15 consecutive days of lost business may shut the doors of the bar, which Keidel said was just starting to make waves in a location, which has seen many establishments come and go without much success.

"I feel like I am being judged and punished by people who have not crossed my threshold to know who I am or how I do business," Keidel said.

In the meantime, Keidel is hoping his patrons and the community at large will frequent his establishment, and plan some events to get him through the 15 days of lost business. He said several people are working on things now.

In the future, Keidel said he will not rent the establishment for large parties of any sort, and has closed the upstairs portion of his bar unless enough people are staffed to keep an eye on situations.

Walker said he could not comment on the matter on the record.