



Community support saves neighborhood bar: Bottle and Barrel set to reopen in December

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Although black curtains currently cover the windows of Bottle and Barrel on East Broadway, a 15-day suspension from the City of Alton is not a curtain call for the establishment.

That suspension of 15 consecutive days would normally be a death sentence for a bar, but not this time. Owner, Chris Kiedel, said the punishment inflicted by the city came as an odd mixed blessing. Because of the publicity generated by what many believed to be an unfair sentencing, Kiedel said more than double his usual crowd has been coming to the bar, which closed last Sunday for the first of its 15 days. During the last three days alone, Kiedel said he nearly made enough to assure a reopening, due to musical shows organized by community members. In fact, Kiedel said he was overwhelmed by the sheer amount of community support.

Those 15 consecutive days closure were given to Kiedel and the establishment by the City of Alton following a video shared on Facebook. That video featured women exposing their breasts, and allegedly getting completely naked at a private party, which was hosted in the Bottle and Barrel building. Kiedel said he was unaware of that activity, adding the party's host rented the building for the evening for that function.

An incident report attained by Riverbender.com also alleged another video existed of oral sex being conducted at that party, but stated that video was not available. A reporter from Riverbender.com searched for that video to no avail. Kiedel said he was not aware of the existence of the second video, but said he watched enough of the first to see the exposed breasts.

Following his viewing of the video, Kiedel said he called Alton Mayor Brant Walker to discuss it. That discussion turned into a punishment of up to 30 consecutive days closure and a fine of \$750. Those 30 days became 15, and the fine was dropped to \$500.

Despite the fact the punishment was minimized, Kiedel said it was still a death sentence for his "day-by-day" bar - or it least it would have been without community support.

Kiedel said he does not have any issue with Walker, adding the mayor did what he felt was best. Instead of focusing on the incident and the punishment, Kiedel decided to look toward the future after he reopens to thank the community, which gave him enough business and "love" to survive these 15 days without guaranteed income.

"It's overwhelming," Kiedel said Thursday. "Given what we were facing, I cannot believe what we accomplished."

Every night after the story of the punishment dropped on Riverbender.com, Kiedel said business increased. Musical acts from locals like Erin Jo Paddlefoot, Biff K'narly and the Reptilians and Scribble increased attendance even further at the end of last week.

But, what happens after Dec. 11 when Kiedel is able to reopen?

"We wanted to show our gratitude for everything the community did for us by giving back to it," Kiedel said. "We're working on a lot of things right now, like a food drive."

While Kiedel is not sure if he will reopen immediately on Dec. 11, he said the first big event to celebrate his bar's survival will be a food drive organized by Bennington Investment Group.

Another event - an ugly sweater party - will be hosted later in December to benefit the SNIP Alliance, which spays and neuters animals.

Kiedel also wants to continue his establishment's long history of supporting local original music - a history founded when he ran the Big Muddy Pub on State Street. Local groovy surf rock revival band Polyshades will be releasing an EP on Dec. 23 in the bar, and local genre-bending guitar rock group Biff K'narly and the Reptilians will do another EP release on Jan. 20.

In the wake of the closure, Kiedel said he will have a renewed focus on community. He said many business owners and employees along the Broadway Corridor came to Bottle and Barrel over the last few weeks and supported him, even if they did not drink. He said he wants to give back to them and continue pushing for the feeling of family this obstacle has created.

As for the reopening, Kiedel said it can happen any time after Dec. 11, but it may not happen exactly at that time.

"We're going to be doing some things to freshen up the place," he said. "We may have to wait a day or two for paint to dry."