  
 Archive: Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue | Today

**Metro and State**



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Wednesday, January 23, 2008

**Carl's may go from strip steaks to strippers**

Christine MacDonald / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- The venerable Carl's Chop House has served New York strip steaks to generations of upscale Detroiters for more than 75 years -- but it soon could convert into a strip club.

Owner Frank Passalacqua says sagging business convinced him to consider making the switch to adult entertainment. He's filed an application with the state for a topless permit -- by no means a slam-dunk in a city that has resisted strip clubs in recent years.

"I lost \$1 million last year," said Passalacqua, who bought the Detroit institution at Grand River and the Lodge Freeway in 1990.

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"I don't have another \$1 million to lose. The last three or four years, it's just gone down."

Nostalgic Detroiters may remember the landmark, along with the defunct London Chop House, as the places movers and shakers went to make handshake deals over expense-account dinners.

Prominent labor leaders, lawyers and politicians considered it a second office. And its proximity to the long-departed Tiger Stadium and Olympia Stadium made it a pre-game must for Lions, Red Wings and Tigers fans.

"It's just so wrong," said Eileen Trombley Glick, a former Detroitier who runs a Web site called detroitmemories.com. Trombley Glick recalls saving

up for a before-prom dinner at Carl's.

"That was *the* place to go," she said.

But Passalacqua said those loyal patrons are long gone. Carl's served nearly 3,000 people a day in the 1960s. Today on some weeknights, Passalacqua said he is lucky to draw in any patrons.

"They don't have money to fool around any more," he said. "I am just trying to stay in business. I am working with what I have."

The restaurant is a neighbor to the Motor City Casino.

But the casino offers gamblers comp meals at only its own restaurants. Passalacqua said he's never seen an economic bump from the casino, even with the recent expansion.

A Motor City official was not available for comment Tuesday about the potential change at Carl's.

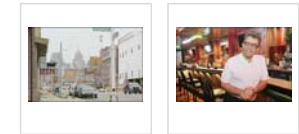
The restaurant was founded by Carl Rosenfield, a World War I vet who won his partner's share of their Tiger Bar in a poker game and opened Carl's Chop House at the 3020 Grand River location in 1932.

He was a beloved restaurateur in town, known for making the highest bids on 4-H kids' cattle at the Michigan State Fair.

Wait staff -- dressed in white nylon uniforms -- made careers at the restaurant, some spending up to 40 years on the job.



Owner Frank Passalacqua says Carl's Chop House, a Detroit institution near Motor City Casino, is lucky to get any patrons some nights. (Velvet S. McNeil / The Detroit News)



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Not much has changed since Carl's heydays.

The deep red carpet dotted with a pattern of Black Angus steer heads against blue ribbons is still there, although more worn than when it was custom-made for Rosenfield.

The dark, wood-paneled walls, booths and tables are from that era as well. Outside, the life-size fiberglass bull remains perched above the neon Carl's sign.

But if Passalacqua is successful in getting a permit, the bull will come down and the restaurant's name will change. He said he plans to serve the same menu, but will add a stage to the center of the restaurant's main room.

Kevin Moore, president of Teamsters Local 299, said many a labor contract was hashed out over a filet or lobster at Carl's over the years.

He's sad the history may be lost, but acknowledged the facility has lost its draw and needs updating.

"It was the kind of the who's-who place," Moore said. "Lawyers, judges, politicians, union leaders they all knew they could meet there and get things done."

Passalacqua has several hurdles to jump before he can offer strippers as well as strips.

City departments are reviewing his requests, but in the past the Detroit City Council has fought new strip clubs, even refusing to transfer liquor licenses when clubs are sold. Powerful pastors have lobbied council to take a tough stance.

And the crackdown has resulted in lawsuits from the strip clubs. At least three are suing the city in federal court and the city settled a fourth in 2006 for \$500,000.

Besides the community opposition, Passalacqua's restaurant is not zoned for a strip club and he'd have to apply for a change -- which could be a difficult process as well.

This isn't the first time Passalacqua has warned of the restaurant's impending doom if changes aren't made.

In 1993, he threatened to move Carl's and his other restaurant at the time -- Mario's -- to the suburbs if the city didn't grant his \$2 million application for federal grant money to rehab them.

His request didn't go anywhere and Passalacqua stayed put. His son owns Mario's, a well-loved Italian restaurant on Second Avenue north of Mack.

Passalacqua said it hurts him to end the Carl's tradition, but said he has to try something different.

He owes at least \$6,700 on 2006 taxes, according to county records.

"I am not sure if it's going to work," Passalacqua said. "I am hoping."

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## Site Index

### Essentials:

Home  
Page One PDF  
Sports PDF  
Weather  
Horoscope  
Lottery  
Crossword  
Sudoku  
Contact Us  
**Multimedia:**  
Photos/Video  
News Photos  
Autos Photos  
Audio Galleries  
Video  
Photo Store

### News:

Nation/World  
Politics/Govt.  
Elections  
Religion  
**Local/State:**  
Metro/State  
Wayne  
Oakland  
Macomb  
Livingston  
Commuting  
Schools  
Michigan History  
Obituaries  
Death Notices

### Autos:

Autos Insider  
Drive  
Joyrides  
Auto Shows  
Auto Reviews  
Auto Photos  
Autos Talk  
Test Drive blog  
**Business:**  
Business News  
Personal  
Finance  
Stocks  
Technology

### Sports:

Sports  
Lions/NFL  
Pistons/NBA  
Red Wings/NHL  
Tigers/MLB  
Shock/WNBA  
MSU  
U-M  
More Colleges  
High Schools  
Golf  
Motor Sports  
More Sports  
Ski Guide  
Scoreboards

### Entertainment:

Entertainment  
Music  
Calendar  
Movies  
Movie Finder  
TV Listings  
TV/Radio  
Restaurants  
Wine Report  
Celebs  
Performing Arts  
Casinos  
Puzzles/Games

### Forums:

Forums Index  
Lions Talk  
Wings Talk  
Pistons Talk  
Tigers Talk  
Ask Mike O'Hara  
Big Ten Talk  
News Talk  
Autos Talk  
Faith Talk  
**Opinions:**  
Editorials  
Letter to Editor  
Blogs  
Columnists  
Cybersurveys

### Lifestyle:

Lifestyle  
Homestyle  
Food  
Recipe Finder  
Health/Fitness  
Fashion/Shopping  
Families/Parenting  
Travel/Recreation  
MichMoms  
MichDads  
**Other**  
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