

Porky's attracts kids,



Brian Barber/Daily Nebraskan

Arcade closes after complaints from neighbors

Analysis by Kevin Cowan
Senior Reporter

For the past four months, Porky's Family Fun Center, 2021 O St., has been the scene of varied disturbances, arrests and citations. At the end of September, Porky's closed.

The "Porky's controversy" involves more than enforcement and violation, the police, the media, the mayor's office and the Lincoln population in general.

It was a business, trying to conform with the authorities' requests just as any law-abiding business would have. But there was something more than city code conformance.

The Porky's phenomena started several years ago as a parking problem in the neighborhoods of the Near South District.

Jerry Dabrusky, owner of Nebraska Coin-Op Distributors, maintained a video arcade on 23rd and D streets.

"We were the only commercial business in that area," he said. "People would call in and complain that the refrigeration unit on our Tombstone Pizza truck was too loud" and that parked cars were

clogging the streets. "Well, I run a business and employ a sizeable number of people that have to have a place to park."

The arcade had to close its doors "because of neighborhood pressure," he said.

After the business closed, Dabrusky continued to feel heat from city officials. The more the business tried to conform, he said, the more visits it received from police, and health code and humane society officials.

"When someone wants you gone," he said, "they use all the means at their disposal. And when people keep calling in complaints, eventually they (the city) just do something about it."

For example, a \$600 health code violation was issued because Nebraska Coin-Op didn't have lids on garbage cans, he said.

"I pointed out the other residences who were also in violation of that health code," he said, but it didn't do any good.

At the height of the confrontation, he said, "there was a cop outside inspecting parked cars for defective mufflers and tail lights and all that, just to see what he could get us for," he said, thumbing

a stack of tickets.

Dabrusky said his problems were the result of efforts made by City Council member Jo Gutsell.

Gutsell was a resident of the Near South District and president of the Near South Neighborhood Association. Gutsell, Dabrusky said, was the person primarily involved with closing his arcade.

"I was receiving a lot of complaints about them from the residences in the neighborhood," Gutsell said, "and he was in violation" of the codes in question.

"You can find violations of city code in any building," Dabrusky said. "I mean, if they want to get you for something, they can."

Despite the problems with the first arcade, Dabrusky decided to open Porky's Family Fun Center on June 1.

"The disturbances started two weeks later," said Lincoln Police Chief Dean Leitner.

The disturbances, he said, included vandalism, larceny and littering.

"Porky's had little control over what people do off their premises," said Bob Creager, counsel for Porky's. "If you put a bar in that same location, an increase in dis-

turbances would occur as well."

In July, two youths were in a pushing match and one pushed the other through a window.

Gutsell and Leitner both said the problem arose from a lack of security.

"We had an attendant behind the counter who saw it," Dabrusky said, "and he was going over to take care of it. We also had another employee 20 feet away" who was on his way to break up the fight.

"We also had two security guards out in the back lot." But when people get together to "have fun," he said, "you're going to have that kind of problem sometimes."

"I've seen fights at church picnics," Dabrusky said.

Porky's met with the police and with the Mayor's Council on Youth to attempt to find a solution to the problem. Many solutions were proposed, but none could make the "disturbances" stop.

Dabrusky said he had contact with at least four police officers to try to solve the problem. He said he asked one if the business could do anything to help the problem, and the officer "said one word: Close."

In August, four nearby businesses filed suit against Porky's.

The businesses, Williamson Oldsmobile Honda, 21st and N streets; McVicker Auto Trim and Tops, 2043 O St.; Big A Auto Parts, 1955 O St.; and Road and Track Motors Service, 2045 O St., represented by Thom Cope, planned to file a district petition to close Porky's.

The petition alleged that Porky's created a public nuisance because it attracted people of all ages who are disorderly and damage the plaintiff's property and the property of their customers.

Creager said Porky's was "mischaracterized."

"If you live next door to a feed lot that stinks or a grain elevator whose fans are making noise constantly, then it's a nuisance. If there's illegal activity associated with the business, then it's a nuisance. But it's not the role of society to punish people who aren't breaking the law. You're supposed to arrest the people who are violating the law."

Since the suit was filed, the owners have not had any more trouble. Now, before next Tuesday's court date, the two par-



Photos clockwise from middle: A Lincoln youth is arrested behind Porkey's. Porkey's clientele hang out in the back parking lot. Porky's Family Fun Center, 2021 O St.

Photos by:
Eric Gregory
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See PORKY'S on 12