

Theater converted into country-western club

Guitars & Cadillacs expands into Lincoln



By Jill O'Brien
Staff Reporter

You don't have to wear a western shirt, cowboy boots or a black Stetson to fit in at Guitars & Cadillacs, but an appreciation for country music helps.

Kansas City partners Jack Hanrahan, Dave McQuitty and Paul Zimmerman opened the country bar at 5400 O St. about two weeks ago.

Zimmerman said the first Guitars & Cadillacs club opened in Kansas City, Mo., in 1988. Since then, Guitars & Cadillacs has expanded to include two Kansas City locations; one club in Des Moines, Iowa; one under construction in Olathe, Kan.; and one in Omaha.

"We opened in Omaha a year ago, and a lot of our customers from Lincoln indicated that they sure would like to have a nice first-class country-western nightclub in Lincoln," Zimmerman said.

Even though the partners prefer putting their clubs in cities with a 250,000 population, Lincoln looked good logistically, Zimmerman said — especially when the smaller towns were figured in.

"Basically, one thing led to another," he said. "The Cooper turned up available, which was the right location, and ... here we are."

The "Cooper" that Zimmerman refers to was the Lincoln Cooper Theatre. Now, instead of showing movies on the large screen, Guitars' customers view the latest country videos on two 8-foot screens.

Seven levels, including four levels of customer seating, one level with a new varnished dance floor, a balcony level with a bar and disc jockey and two levels outfitted with bars, pool tables, dart boards and a blackjack table, have replaced the concession stand and theater seats.

The club employs 85 people, including several college students, Zimmerman said.



Staci McKee/DN

Art Rigg, general manager of Guitars and Cadillacs, said dance lessons are becoming a popular part of the new bar.

Employee Al Pickering, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln junior commercial advertising major, said he remembered when he attended movies at the Cooper.

"It's cool now to go in and sit there and look around and have a beer," he said.

In spite of all the changes, the original sound system of the theater was retained, Zimmerman said.

"The acoustics in the club are really outstanding — just absolutely outstanding. It's actually the best sound we've got in any of our clubs because those speakers are the best you can get."

The sound system will be put to a live test this month when country recording artist Shawn Camp plays

Nov. 11 and Doug Supernaw plays on Nov. 30, Zimmerman said.

"We've had Garth Brooks play for us twice — this was obviously when he was up-and-coming — on a couple of occasions for Guitars in Kansas City," he said.

It is unlikely Brooks will play at Guitars in Lincoln, Zimmerman said, but customers are treated to national country music acts twice a month.

Zimmerman, 36, was raised on a Kansas farm where he grew up listening to a mixture of rock and roll and country music.

"Rock and roll is really taking a back seat to country music where country was the back seat 10 years ago. ... Country has very much moved into the mainstream," he said.

At Guitars & Cadillacs, customers can enjoy more than an earful of mainstream country music and a beer.

Free instruction in country dancing is offered.

"Based on the individual night, we do anything from line dances to the two-step to the beginner's two-step, from the triple step to the tush-push. We have different ones every night from Monday through Thursday," he said.

Every night is different, even when it comes to the buffet selection, which includes a Tex-Mex night and an evening of oriental feasting.

Besides a variety of buffets, other activities line the club calendar.

Sports fans can view football on big screens on Monday nights and

return Tuesday to watch or compete in the men's "tight fittin'" jeans contests, Zimmerman said.

Valet parking is another service the club offers, he said. For \$3, customers can hand over their car keys and let Guitars & Cadillacs do the parking.

With a platinum club card membership, valet parking is free. Platinum and gold card memberships entitle cardholders to discounted or free concert tickets and other privileges.

The combination of services and atmosphere is paying off for the club.

"Lincoln is turning out to be what I thought it would be. On Fridays and Saturdays, there's probably 1,600 to 1,700 people coming through our doors," Zimmerman said.

"We're very, very busy."

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Inaugural poet cancels reading

By Paula Lavigne
Staff Reporter

"An Evening With Maya Angelou," sponsored by the University Program Council at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, scheduled for Dec. 2 at Pershing Auditorium, has been cancelled.

James Buckley, coordinator of campus programs at the Office of Student Affairs, said Angelou had engagements outside the United States which forced her to cancel her Lincoln appearance.

"Unfortunately for us, they feel she should be out of the country to promote her new work instead of coming here," he said.

Refunds will be issued to those who have already purchased tickets. Ticket holders should go to the Ticketmaster outlet from which they purchased their tickets to receive a refund.

Ticket holders who called in their orders should call the number they telephoned for a refund. In Lincoln, 475-1212, in Omaha, 422-1212.

Buckley said there was a very remote chance UPC could reschedule the event for the spring semester. He said the UPC and the Office of Student Involvement would do "everything humanly possible."

Angelou's performance was to include various readings of her works, Buckley said. He said she also planned to talk about current affairs and offer a question and answer forum.

Angelou received national attention when she read her poem "On the Pulse of the Morning," at President Bill Clinton's inauguration. She has been honored as one of America's most outstanding African American poets.



Courtesy of Columbia

Singin' Cowboys

Riders in the Sky will perform Friday night at 8 p.m. at the Lied Center for Performing Arts. Ranger Doug, Too Slim and Woody Paul will perform cowboy classics as well as original material. Tickets are \$14, \$12 and \$10 — half price for UNL students — and are available at the Lied Center box office.

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