

THE HOMER'S ODYSSEY

Sailing through the calls of corporate Sirens

BY CHRISTOPHER HEINE
Staff writer

By gripping on to everything it could, Homer's survived the effects of a corporate monsoon that intended to wipe the path clear in the early 1990s for future conglomerate domination.

The Omaha-based music retail chain not only survived the era of big-money invasions, it is now flourishing.

However, not everyone in Lincoln has been so fortunate.

Project Import, Backstreet Records, Pickles and Twisters were washed away by the price-slashing tactics of big business.

In fact, Recycled Sounds is the only current Lincoln music store that predates 1994.

But not everyone in Nebraska became victim to the trend of corporate saturation in the music economy.

Homer's Music and Gifts did what everyone from hog farmers to clothing stores needed to do earlier this decade — they got bigger.

With meteorological market savvy, Homer's expanded their company by buying out a huge portion of the Lincoln music retail market, and now is Nebraska's only locally owned chain.

In 1994, the franchise purchased Lincoln's two independent chains, Pickles and Twisters, and bolstered a 15-store roster with shops dotting the maps of the capital city and Omaha.

This bold annexation allowed Homer's to compete with the national and multinational companies, such as Best Buy, Target, Wal-Mart and Musicland; all of whom had begun invigorating their commitments to selling music.

Many of these national outlets sent shock waves throughout the independent music industry by improving their selections. Before the '90s, places such as Wal-Mart and Target only carried run-of-the-mill pop albums, but now they offer volumes of jazz, obscure rock and even high-brow classical selections.

Mike Fratt, vice-president of Homer's, said the deepening of his com-

pany's assets enabled the franchise to compete with incoming competition.

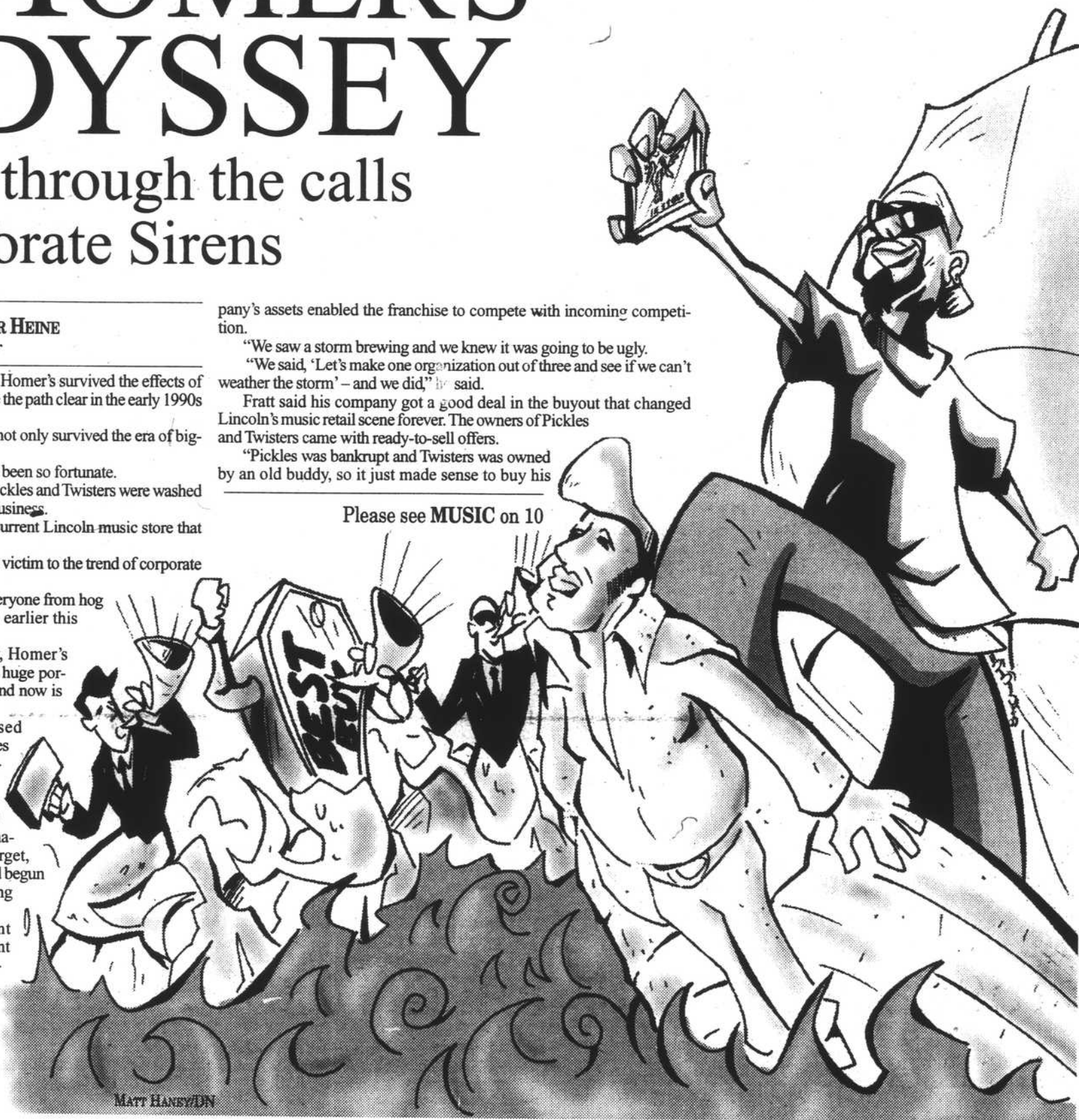
"We saw a storm brewing and we knew it was going to be ugly.

"We said, 'Let's make one organization out of three and see if we can't weather the storm' — and we did," he said.

Fratt said his company got a good deal in the buyout that changed Lincoln's music retail scene forever. The owners of Pickles and Twisters came with ready-to-sell offers.

"Pickles was bankrupt and Twisters was owned by an old buddy, so it just made sense to buy his

Please see MUSIC on 10



Store zeros in on indie bands

Owner focuses on underground inventory availability

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior staff writer

Tucked away in a tiny downtown basement, Kevin Chasek deals his assortment of indie records and compact discs.

His store, Zero Street Records, is a one-man show dedicated to promoting the underground music scene.

Chasek has owned Zero Street Records, 120 N. 14th St., for almost a year and a half. Before him, Garth Johnson owned the store for three years.

During that time, the store has built up a reputation via word of mouth for its inventory of indie rock and punk albums, selling most of its wares to college and high school students.

"People know they can come here and find things that are not widely distributed on major labels," Chasek said.

Chasek gets most of his inventory from smaller distributors, occasionally going to major labels for certain things.

"Most of the distributor's I deal

with are almost mom and pop sorts of things. I do it just to keep the independent music scene thriving," Chasek said.

That's the same reason people shop at his store, he said. His clients are more interested in the actual music than saving a couple of dollars, he said.

Stores such as Zero Street Records are dedicated to serving the bands who record on indie labels, Chasek said.

Chasek said indie bands avoid recording on major labels because they don't want their albums to be sold by large corporate music stores.

Indie bands dislike large corporate music stores such as Best Buy, Chasek said, because they thwart small, local businesses. They also ignore the personalities and needs of their customers.

"I don't think (Best Buy) contributes to the local market at all except for giving people cheap stuff and not caring about the people who buy it," Chasek said.

That's not the case with Zero Street Records, Chasek said.

"People know I care about what

happens with the underground music scene," Chasek said.

Though Chasek stressed the negative impacts of a corporation store such as Best Buy, he did not see much competition between his store and the chain.

"Best Buy is so big that a fly like me doesn't matter in terms of their sales," Chasek said.

However, without a large corporation store, Chasek said, Lincoln would be more conducive to the growth of local businesses. Consumer's options wouldn't suffer because Homer's would still be here, Chasek said.

"If Best Buy can get it, Homer's can get it. If it's not on a major label, I can get it. You just have to have the patience to wait long enough," Chasek said.

But a store such as Best Buy is here to stay, Chasek said. That's a fact he has learned to live with.

"I'm not bitter at all about the situation," Chasek said. "It's just a reality. I realize that I have my niche to fulfill. As long as I can do that, I'm happy."

Used music stores offer rare finds, collectibles

BY JOSH KRAUTER
Staff writer

For the average consumer, making music purchases is a relatively easy task. But for serious music collectors, finding that rare, out-of-print CD or album can be hard work.

Stuart Kolnick, owner of Recycled Sounds, and Travis Mills, manager of Disc Go Round, both say used CD stores are often the best option for music obsessives and average consumers alike.

"People ought to give used CD stores a try," Mills said. "Honestly, it's the same product as in a big chain store for a lot cheaper."

Mills and a former college roommate jumped into the Disc Go Round franchise four years ago. Mills' friend is no longer involved, but Mills still runs the store.

Kolnick worked in record stores for years, including Dirt Cheap in Omaha, before bringing Recycled

"There's no way in hell Best Buy will buy back used CDs."

TRAVIS MILLS
manager of Disc Go Round

Sounds in Lincoln about seven years ago. His own experience collecting records gave him the idea for his store.

"I collected lots and lots and lots of stuff," he said. "I filled basements and bedrooms."

One might think the popularity of chain stores in Lincoln would hurt smaller businesses, but Kolnick and Mills both say the big chain stores aren't really a worry.

Please see USED on 10