

FIRST DRAFT

For 32 years, Café Caravan was Grand Junction's meeting place

When she was managing the Café Caravan in Grand Junction, Thelma Hays discovered she had to perform a juggling act.

For instance when a local business, celebrating its 25th anniversary, asked Hays to hire a stripper to entertain its employees, she fulfilled the customer's request. But that same evening, in adjoining banquet rooms, Hays and her employees also had to accommodate Gideons International — the group that puts Bibles in hotel rooms — and a local chapter of the Girl Scouts.

Hays juggled well. All three gatherings occurred without conflicts or complaints, she said.

That evening was unusual, but it was emblematic of the busy schedule that was maintained at the Café Caravan and its famous Jungle Bar.

"The town was still pretty small" in those years "and the Caravan was the place to go," Hays said. "It had the biggest seating capacity in the area."

Weekly luncheon meetings of local groups included the Quarterback Club, Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs and the Mesa County Bar Association. Others, such as the local physicians' group and contractors' association, met once a month.

There were also special events, such as those mentioned above, and live music in the Jungle Bar.

New Year's Eve parties frequently involved as many as 600 people over the course of the night, and several bands playing in different parts of the building.

The last New Year's Eve gathering at Café Caravan was on Dec. 31, 1985, or 32 years ago this month. That's also how many years the Caravan was in business.

The establishment was started by Marian and John Vogel in early 1954. Marian later married Ival Young, but she operated the Caravan with her brother, Alan Simpson.

Eventually, Hays purchased a 25 percent interest in the Caravan, and the three of them owned it jointly at the time it closed.

Hays began working as a waitress at the Caravan in 1957, when she had two young sons. As they do now, she and her husband, Herb, lived on a farm in De Beque Canyon, just downstream from the roller dam.

Herb worked construction and would leave early in the morning for his job, then return by 5:30 to watch the children and let Thelma take the car to work at the Caravan.



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel
Norma Wilder and Thelma Hays, former colleagues at the Café Caravan in Grand Junction, visited together last week.

"We did that eight or nine years," Hays recalled. "Then I became a hostess."

The training she obtained at the Park School of Business in Denver in the early 1950s also served her well, and by the early 1970s she was named manager of the Caravan.

Hays' longtime friend and co-worker, Norma Wilder, was a young mother when she began working at the Caravan in autumn of 1954, nine months after the club opened. She continued there until the business closed.

A few years after she began working at the Caravan, Norma couldn't persuade her young son, Gene, to learn his home address.

When she asked him what he would tell police officers if he was ever lost, he replied, "I'll tell them to take me to the monkey house. That's where my Mama works."

Café Caravan was noted for the bright neon giraffe and lion signs that marked the outside of the building at First and Main streets, and for live monkeys in cages at the back of the Jungle Bar.

It was a busy place, but rarely too rowdy, even with nightly dances. Hays said she only called the police about a dozen times during the years she managed the club.

"I stared down hundreds of drunks, though," she added.

There was a dress code at the Caravan in the early years that required jackets and ties for men, and skirts or dresses for women. No cowboy hats were allowed inside.

Sometimes the dress codes were ignored, however. Hays said she recalled one afternoon when she and Wilder were the only ones working at the Caravan.

"We heard a big roar and

There were other events that stick out in the memories of the two former Café Caravan colleagues.

■ Sen. John F. Kennedy had dinner at the restaurant shortly before he announced his 1960 candidacy for president.

■ Wilder waited on both Eleanor Roosevelt and astronaut Scott Carpenter, on separate occasions.

■ Country musicians such as Tommy Overstreet, Farron Young, LeRoy Van Dyke and Ray Price all appeared at the Caravan.

■ Hays took action after she learned from a customer that a fancy motor home occupying a spot in the parking lot was actually a mobile bordello.

When a union announced a strike against the Caravan, then Daily Sentinel Publisher Preston Walker called to say he would stop by several times a day, for coffee and meals, to help the club weather the storm.

During its heyday, the Caravan employed nearly 100 people.

It helped a lot of workers raise families and contributed significantly to the local economy, Hays said.

By the mid-1980s, however, with the decline in the local economy after the oil shale bust, there were about 50 employees.

"We didn't have any debts, and we could pay all our bills. We decided it was a good time to close," Hays said.

Since the closure, Hays has served on various local boards and organizations. She ran unsuccessfully for Mesa County commissioner in 1988. She also operated businesses on Main Street.

She continues to run Mount Garfield Fruit and Vegetable Stand near Clifton and operates the farm with her husband.

Wilder raised her son and cared for her disabled husband.

Information from Thelma Hays and Norma Wilder.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.



THELMA HAYS/Special to the Sentinel
An advertisement for the Café Caravan, circa 1982.

looked out to see all sorts of motorcycles," she said. "It was the Hell's Angels."

The two women were a bit intimidated by the bikers. But they proved to be very polite customers who tipped well, Wilder said.

On another occasion, 300 people showed up for a wedding reception, even though there had been no wedding. The groom had failed to get a wedding license, and the bride was devastated.

Hays called the bride's family and urged them to attend anyway, which they did. The reception continued as scheduled.

State now regularly releases pot sales data

By CHARLES ASHBY
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In an effort to help the public better track the marijuana industry, the Colorado Department of Revenue has started to provide monthly reports on the sales of retail and medical marijuana.

That data, available on the department's website, not only shows record sales, but also lists it county by county. Those numbers show a steady increase in retail sales statewide, up to about \$100 million per month, and a flat trend for medical marijuana, which has leveled off at less than \$40 million a month.

"We know this information is highly desired by the general public, media and researchers," said Mike Hartman, executive director of the department. "To that end, in our efforts to be as transparent as possible, we will now provide aggregate sales data. That, coupled with the state tax revenue data already provided, will give an accurate picture of the financial footprint of this burgeoning industry."

Locally, that footprint shows a healthy business in Mesa and Garfield counties.

For the past year, retail and medical pot sales in Garfield County now regularly top \$2 million a month, from about \$1.6 million in January.

Though Mesa County has had medical and retail marijuana

sales for years, only recently had it had more than three retail shops, located in De Beque and Palisade, since September.

The state does not release sales or tax information unless there are at least three stores in a single county so as not to divulge too much proprietary information about a single outlet.

As a result, the county saw retail marijuana sales top \$1 million in October, the latest month figures were available. That was up from \$931,000 in September.

No data was released for medical sales because there is only one in the county.

Marijuana taxes, licenses and fee revenues are on track this year to far exceed the \$193 million raised statewide in 2016.

So far this year — January through November — the state and local governments have collected a total of \$226 million in revenues.

The department's Office of Research and Analysis is to produce monthly marijuana sales reports showing the total sales for retail and medical marijuana by county, and keep a running total of actual year-to-date sales, and total sales for full years since 2014.

To see the data, go to www.colorado.gov/pacific/revenue/colorado-marijuana-sales-reports.

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The Daily Sentinel offices will closed on Monday, December 25 and Monday, January 1.

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BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Woman jailed 2nd time

A Grand Junction woman was jailed for the second time in two months.

Gina Mangruem, 39, was jailed Thursday after she allegedly caused second-degree burns to a victim with whom she has an intimate relationship, according to the Grand Junction Police Department.

Mangruem was jailed but immediately released on suspicion of domestic violence and second-degree assault with intent to cause bodily injury at her home in the 100 block of Epps Drive.

Last month, Mangruem was jailed after a police investigation showed she allegedly harassed and shoved another person at the same address, according to the department.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

■ Sharon Petty, 49, was jailed Wednes-

day on suspicion of assault in the 3300 block of Northridge Drive.

■ Raymond Lee Jenkins, 20, was jailed Wednesday on suspicion of first-degree criminal trespass and physical harassment.

■ Brent Sant, 50, was issued summonses Wednesday on suspicion of driving under the influence, failing to yield the right of way and failing to remain at the scene of an accident.

■ Miscellaneous items were stolen from a vehicle Wednesday in the 2800 block of Orchard Avenue.

■ A burglar entered a home Thursday in the 2800 block of Picardy Drive but took nothing and caused no damage.

■ Items valued at less than \$750 were stolen from a vehicle Thursday in the 2600 block of U.S. Highway 50.

■ Donnie Powell, 24, was jailed Friday on suspicion of possession of a controlled substance, resisting arrest and obstructing a peace officer in the 2600

block of Patterson Road.

■ Items were damaged and stolen, resulting in a loss of more than \$300, from a vehicle near the intersection of Fourth Street and Riverside Parkway.

■ Items valued at more than \$2,000 were stolen from a business Thursday in the 500 block of 25 Road.

■ Chantel Searle, 25, was jailed Friday on suspicion of possession of numerous financial devices, identification documents, stolen property and drug paraphernalia.

■ Derek Parker, 42, was jailed Friday on suspicion of assault and preventing his girlfriend from leaving her residence.

■ David Ungaro, 25, was jailed Saturday on suspicion of menacing another person with a knife.

■ Lucas Labonde, 25, was issued a summons Saturday on suspicion of forcing entry into a home in the 400 block of North 17th Street.

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