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The Jam's grand finale set for Dec. 5

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The Jam music venue and bar, the host of hundreds of bands and other acts from across the country in its two-plus years, is set to have its sunset show on Dec. 5.

“That will be a big blowout,” co-owner Eduardo Arenas said of the grand finale that will feature performances by Gainesville groups Savants of Soul, the Duppies, Flat Land and Morning Fatty. “At that point, we will be closing doors at The Jam for the rest of the year.”



Amy L. Stuart/The Gainesville Sun

In this Feb. 8, 2014 file photo, friends gather around a bonfire at The Jam in Gainesville.

In late September, the business initially announced on Facebook that it would be shutting down Nov. 12. “Music brought us together, and we had an awesome time: We are deeply grateful for all the memorable moments.”

But demand from local bands wanting to perform one last time pushed the closing to Dec. 5, with intermittent business hours planned between now and then, Arenas said. Afterward, he and co-owners Veronica Arenas, his sister, and Blake Briand plan to keep their month-to-month lease, but only for private-event rental.

Developing a cult following known as the “The Family,” the business at 817 W. University Ave. celebrated its two-year anniversary in September.

While there is an indoor stage and bar, perhaps The Jam’s most notable feature is the large courtyard behind the building that comes to life with drum circles crowded around a dancing fire pit and a self-built outdoor stage that’s seen the likes of the Original Wailers and the Nappy Roots.

But eventually, Arenas said, the financial struggles became too great.

Those include the production expenses — employees, electricity and equipment — for bands that may not bring in the biggest of crowds.

“When there isn’t enough money coming in through the door to cover those expenses, then we have to come out of pocket,” said Eduardo Arenas, explaining that, at points, he and the other two owners have had to contribute thousands of dollars of their own money.

In addition, The Jam has to pay licensing fees to copyright organizations BMI and ASCAP for any cover songs bands may play, he said.

The Jam's roots started in January 2008 when Veronica Arenas launched a jewelry store in the then-small space on University Avenue, which she evolved into a café named Puerto Tagwa.

Eduardo Arenas said he and other musicians began to practice in the space, eventually hosting open-mic sessions on Thursdays. In September 2012, the venue officially became The Jam, the intent originally being to run out the remaining five months on Puerto Tagwa's lease.

Remaining in the space, the owners have undertaken multiple renovations, including knocking down walls to absorb two additional spots within the 800-block building.

Over the two years, the total count of bands, DJs and acts is about 350, Arenas said, including comedians, burlesque performers, and even high-flying silk acrobats in the courtyard.

Arenas discussed the network of musicians and artists who have become connected with the business — “and that's what The Jam is all about.”

Though the owners don't yet have intentions of fully vacating the space and aren't being given the boot by landlord Innovation Square LLC, the block looks like it will eventually be turned into apartments.

Ed Poppell, director of UF Development Corp., which oversees development of Innovation Square, said a plan for the 800 block is in its final stages “to build apartments for what we call workforce housing — the employees here are working for Mindtree or working for Mobiquity. This would not be student housing.”

Poppell said that, as the deal hasn't been finalized, he couldn't name the buyer but would once it's sold.

As previously reported, business owners on the block were put on month-to-month leases in June in preparation for the planned apartments. Poppell said then he would give tenants six months' notice in advance of needing to leave, and the property buyer could even extend leases through further planning for the site.

Meanwhile, with The Jam set to close before the sale, Fae Nageon De Lestang, singer and violinist for Flat Land, said she's sad to see it go.

“The Jam is one of those places where the people who run it have created something special,” she said, recalling that Flat Land has played 15 or more shows there, “and it's gained a following because people recognize how unique that space is.”

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