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Strip club can re-apply for liquor licence

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
 Staff Writer

The former owner of Bunnies strip club has had his liquor licence revoked by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

But that won't affect the present business owner, John May, who re-opened the club in June after working closely with town bylaw staff to alleviate concerns about sex-for-money activities at the Anderson Avenue bar.

The new operation is called Friction. "I called it that because of all the friction I had to go through to get the club open," May quipped.

A commission panel revoked the licence held by former owner Aldo Collarile Aug. 22. Neither Collarile nor his legal representatives showed up for the formal hearing, which heard evidence that:

- Dancers regularly solicited customers for sexual services in the club's VIP rooms;
- Dancers engaged in indecent theatrical performances;
- A raid by York Regional Police on Sept. 10, 1998, revealed a number of documents used to form a proceeds of crime investigation and that more than \$10 million of unaccounted for money was allegedly from prostitution-related activities over a two-year period;
- The licence holder failed to ensure light meals were available;
- The club sold "adulterated" liquor, or watered down drinks, in some cases by almost half;
- Bouncers, on at least one occasion, used excessive force to subdue an unruly patron;
- Collarile provided false information about the club's owner/manager,

Ricardo DiGuiseppe, to get the licence; • The licensee permitted narcotics to be sold on site.

Commission spokesperson Ab Campion said it would be very difficult for either Collarile or DiGuiseppe to get another liquor licence in the province.

"This will be on record forever and ever," he said. "If, at some time in the future, they apply for a new licence to open a new establishment ... because of the past conduct, the registrar of licensing would likely put forward a proposal that it not be approved," Campion said.

He added that, since the business has been sold to May, the club gets another chance.

May, meanwhile, is having his own troubles.

Summer is notoriously slow in the adult entertainment business and May said the proliferation of massage parlours and pornography on the Internet is seriously affecting sales.

"The rub and tugs and the Internet have taken away a lot of clients," he said, adding he runs a clean, performance-based business.

"Why would someone pay \$20 for a dance when they can go to a rub and tug and pay \$60 or \$80 for the full service? It's not just me, it's the entire industry. Clubs downtown are down 40 per cent," he said. "I had to go through a lot to open this place, but I sense many municipalities are licensing massage parlours without doing their homework."

He said while there's still an opportunity for profit, "it's a lot tighter".

May will re-evaluate Friction's bottom line this fall and decide whether he can make a go of it.

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