

News Article

Charleston Gazette Opinion Editorial | June 30, 2004

Crying over spilled ice cream

Bruster's did not close to make room for new gambling parlor in Weirton

By Fred Lutz

I was the owner of the former Bruster's on Three Springs Drive in Weirton. The implication in the article "They just want ice cream" (June 24) that Bruster's closed to make way for a gambling parlor is ludicrous. I take offense at the misconception the media and community have that Bruster's left Weirton to make room for a gambling parlor.

For the record, my wife and I opened Bruster's in 1999. We are a family with three small children. We wanted to have a part of the American dream and open a family-oriented business that would be fun and our children would be able to be a part of one day.

Unfortunately, the lack of sales overhead expenses for product, labor, franchise fees, royalties, loans and other costs were overwhelming. As a result, we were losing tens of thousands of dollars every year and our personal finances were dwindling to the point of bankruptcy. In fact, we were very close to losing our home.

About one and a half years before any gambling came along I put the business up for sale through a broker and through Bruster's. The attempt was unsuccessful.

The losses over a four-year period of time were so substantial that in October 2003, the doors to Bruster's were going to be shuttered for good. To be clear, I was going to out of business irrespective of any gambling.

With decreasing sales of about 25 percent each year from 1999 when we opened, I could not afford to continue. Are the parents in this article suggesting that somehow I stay open despite losing huge sums of money – just to serve ice cream to their kids and others?

Obviously, we live in a capitalistic country that is driven by the free market. Weirton did not support this ice cream franchise enough to keep it financially solvent. I wonder where were the parents of the kids (and the kids) seeking signatures on the petition when I was open?

Anyway, the building would have been boarded up and empty had two businessmen not bought it. I am thankful to these businessmen for purchasing it and operating their business. Dan O's, and the city should be too.

Yes, Dan O's has video lottery machines, but its new owners invested a lot of money in the building and the new business is a first-class establishment.

I am grateful to the businessmen who bought my property. If it weren't for them, I would be in financial ruins and my kids would be out more than just ice cream. All business is market-driven, and simply put Weirton did not support us. So now, don't cry over spilled ice cream.

Thomas Fitro
President

Anthony "Herk" Sparachane
Vice President

Lee Wesson
Treasurer

Patricia Rouse Pope
Executive Director

**West Virginia Amusement
& Limited Video Lottery
OPERATORS ASSOCIATION**

PO Box 2549
Charleston, WV 25329

WVALVLOA@aol.com

304.342.1737 phone
304.342.1737 fax