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# The Villager

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Serving West and East Village, Chelsea, SoHo, NoHo, Little Italy, Chinatown and the Lower East Side

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Villager photo by Bob Arihood

Inside Zum Schneider, a German-style beer hall at E. Seventh St. and Avenue C.

## Eviction fight is brewing over Avenue C beer garden

By David Freedlander

It's Saturday night, and Zum Schneider, the anachronistic German beer hall on Seventh St. and Avenue C, is packed with the ruddy faces of East Village revelers stopping in for a pint of genuine Bavarian pilsner and some Wiener schnitzel.

But if the bar's landlords have their way, all of this merrymaking will cease, possibly as soon as this summer.

The bar was served an eviction notice by the board of the Housing Development Fund Corporation co-op above the establishment. They have a court date in two weeks.

Zum Schneider is being accused of, among other things, excessive noise, attracting vermin and blocking the sidewalk entrance to the apartment building. All of which the bar's supporters say is hogwash, a ploy to get them kicked out so the landlords can raise the rent.

"It's obvious they can get more money from someone else being there so they are trying to use technical defects in the lease," said Adam Bailey, the lawyer representing Zum Schneider. "H.D.F.C.'s are supposed to be helping the little guy, not kicking them out. This is un-American."

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The Housing Development Fund Corporation is a state program designed to allow residents who would otherwise be unable to afford a home to buy a share in an apartment building. H.D.F.C. buildings are required by law to remain available to low-income people.

When the bar's owner, Sylvester Schneider, opened the place in 2001, Avenue C was still a gritty outpost in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood, and the corner of Seventh and C was occupied by an abandoned video store that attracted drug dealers and derelicts. Now that Loisa is cheek by jowl with trendy restaurants and chic boutiques, Schneider feels he is becoming the unwitting victim of his own success in turning the street around.

"They can double the rent if they kick us out," he said. "We've contributed to make the neighborhood a better place. These people who are giving us a hard time have forgotten the past."

The co-op board disputes that notion.

"Mr. Schneider has been ignoring the fact that this is a residential area," said Conrad Wasmer, an attorney representing the board. "I think they would be willing to take a lower rent for someone else."

Schneider moved to New York from his native Munich 17 years ago, hoping to make it as a rock star. When he started a family, he began to realize that the life of a musician wasn't going to be enough, and so looked into buying a restaurant.

"I'd been in America 12 years and I was really missing home," he said. "I missed the Bavarian beer gardens where everybody could bring their families and their children and their friends and sit together."

Zum Schneider is now an odd piece of the Old World sitting on the Lower East Side. The wooden tables were handmade by Schneider's father and the chairs imported from Munich. Most of the staff are from Germany, and all are fluent in the language. Oktoberfest is an annual event, and on Sundays during the Christmas season the bar holds Bavarian caroling events.

"This is the greatest thing that happened to this neighborhood," said Michael Docher, a resident of the co-op who supports Zum Schneider. "There was no reason for anybody to come to Avenue C before Sylvester brought people here."

"It's so nice to be able to sit on Avenue C and drink a good beer," concurred Rina Root, a longtime resident who was at the bar with her husband and 12-year-old daughter, Anna. "When we first moved here you couldn't even get an in-date yogurt."

When Schneider first rented the space five years ago, the makeup of the co-op board that lived in the building was much different. The new board is determined, he thinks, to get rid of him.

"I've been more or less harassed for three years," he said. "I've been a good boy and I did whatever they asked me to do. They are throwing as many sticks and stones at us as they can. I am willing to compromise but they need to step back."

In the meantime, Schneider and his supporters are fighting the eviction order. A petition that circulates

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among the tables has garnered 600 signatures. An online version has over 1,100 names.

Most of the patrons are now savoring their bites of schupfnudeln and their sips of Spaten, knowing that the days of their local biergarten may be numbered.

“Where else can you get a pint of beer like that?” said Eddie As, a customer who travels all the way from Long Island City, as he held a golden-tinted lager up to the light. “This is a part of New York. You close this place it’s like closing Rockefeller Center. It’d be a shame. It’s all about greed.”