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Owners of Willow Glen's Goosetown Lounge overwhelmed by support

Fundraising campaign to save beloved bar raises \$20,000 in 15 hours



SAN JOSE – JANUARY 18: Some of the paintings that decorate the exterior of Goosetown Lounge are photographed in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose, Calif., on Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. (Randy Vazquez/ Bay Area News Group)

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Gary Rovai was very much Willow Glen's version of George Bailey. That is, of course, if the hero of "It's a Wonderful Life" — Rovai's favorite movie — owned a beloved bar instead of running the building and loan.



From left, a portrait of Lynne Rovai, Lindsey Beall, Stephanie Whaley, and Kristen Carlson at Goosetown Lounge in the Willow Glen neighborhood of San Jose. Rovai is the owner of the family owned lounge. (Randy Vazquez/ Bay Area News Group)

Rovai, who died in August 2019 at age 75, grew up in Willow Glen and was a guy who almost always said yes to someone in need. Willow Glen schools, St. Christopher Church, youth sports teams — you name it and Goosetown Lounge was happy to help. When kids would cut through Goosetown's parking lot to get to the elementary school behind the bar, Rovai served as an impromptu crossing guard to make sure they arrived safely.

"He was the heart and soul of Goosetown," said his wife, **Lynne Rovai**, who continued running the bar with her longtime employees after Gary's death. "He never met anybody who wasn't going to be his friend."

Goosetown Lounge opened in 1996, taking over the Lincoln Avenue location of the Willow Glen Inn, and has become an institution in the San Jose neighborhood, with a reputation for being a comfortable watering hole during the week and a fun karaoke spot on weekends. Of course, just a few months after Rovai's death, the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, shutting down Goosetown in March 2020 and forcing the Rovai family to worry about its future.



But that future is secure — at least for a few more months — thanks to an overwhelming flood of support for a GoFundMe campaign that raised \$20,000 in just 15 hours and now stands at more than \$37,000. As of Monday afternoon, 345 people had donated in amounts ranging from \$20 to \$1,000. The funding will allow Goosetown to pay its rent, utilities and insurance for the next few months, as well as potentially providing for improved outdoor seating when it's allowed to reopen. (Check out the campaign at www.gofundme.com/f/help-save-goosetown.)



Gary Rovai pictured at the entrance to Goosetown Lounge on Lincoln Avenue in San Jose. Rovai, who opened Goosetown in 1996, died at age 75 in August 2019. (Photo by Tiffany Long)

The fundraiser was the idea of **Kristen Carlson**, Gary and Lynne's daughter. For her birthday, she would encourage friends on Facebook to donate to a different nonprofit each year. But when her 40th birthday was approaching this month, she talked to her mom and her two sisters and decided to see if the community would support the family business. She considered the initial \$20,000 goal to be "ambitious," but was persuaded to ask for an amount that would provide the necessary help.

"We've been overwhelmed by the amount of people, and so many messages," said Carlson, who works in the tech industry but put in her time waiting tables at Goosetown as a teenager. "I never thought we'd get to \$20,000. This is the first time in a long time, I feel like there's a light at the end of this tunnel."



Both mother and daughter can't help but believe that all this support wouldn't have happened if people didn't remember Gary Rovai and the times they'd stop by Goosetown to have a chat with him or came to him to support a fundraiser of their own. "He wouldn't have wanted to do this," Carlson concedes. "He was so proud. But he was always the first one to give."

CHEF'S MARKET GETS AN EXTENSION: Chef **Rodney Baca** is elated to share the good news that Chef's Market — the pop-up initiative he started with four other restaurants — is being extended to the end of January. If you're not familiar with the concept, you can place an online order — for a single meal or a family meal for four — and pick it up from the mobile kitchen in the Valley Title parking lot at 375 S. Second St. in downtown San Jose.

For each meal that's ordered, another meal will be prepared and delivered to Hunger at Home or SJ SHIP Kits, two nonprofits that are providing food for unemployed workers. The restaurants involved are The Shop by Chef Baca, Robee's Falafel, Loteria Taco Bar, Hyland House of Sushi and Jora Peruvian Food. Go to chefsmarket1.square.site to view the menus and order from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

Baca says the community response has been great, and you would think that some of the bigger downtown firms — especially those with employees working from home now — could see this as a good opportunity to treat their employees to a fantastic lunch while also helping those who aren't working at all.

COLLECTING CONTEMPORARY ART: The doors of San Jose's Institute of Contemporary Art may be closed right now, but it's still working to engage people in the arts with the ICA Social Club. The bi-weekly online gathering launches this month with a goal of connecting ICA members with artists and other experts from the art world in a series of virtual events, classes and happy hours. It opens Jan. 28 with "A Master Class in Collecting Contemporary Art," a Zoom event featuring artist **Conrad Egyir**, the next artist who will be featured in the ICA's "Facade Project."

The first program is free and open to the public, but the following events are reserved for specific membership levels. Go to www.icasanjose.org/uncategorized/icasocialclub for details.



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