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13 YEARS OF KEEPING COOL



The Air Conditioned Lounge has been there all this time, making its mark in early evenings for happy hours and special events, and not so quietly late into the night. More details are on **PAGE 2**



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Making Your Donation Count

In today's segmented world, with countless charities for every cause, how do you pick the right one?

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Helping People with Music

There are many great studios in town, but few have been in existence since the mid 1970's and only one has a Grammy winning producer at its helm; Pacific Beat Studios with Alan Sanderson. **PG. 8**



Local Photographer Practices Philanthropy Through a Lens

Briana Gallo is a professional fine-art photographer based in La Jolla, but she's really not home much. **PG. 16**

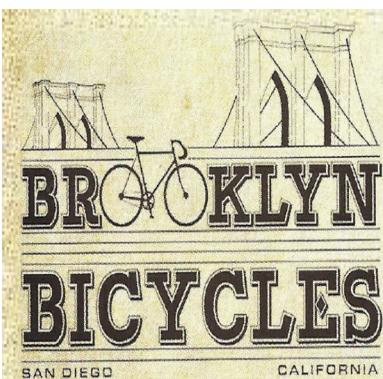
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A Conversation with Gary John of Air Conditioned Lounge



By JON WESLEY EWELL

It's a nice, warm, Fall afternoon in Normal Heights. I'm at Black-market Bakery just off the corner of Adams and 30th street, speaking with Gary John owner of the Air Conditioned Lounge.

From our seats at the bakery we are discussing the 12-foot-wide sign above the AC lounge entrance, just across the street. It boldly displays the cool Air Conditioned Lounge logo and serves as a reminder of just how far this nearly fourteen-year-old establishment on the border of Normal Heights and North Park has come.

"A lot of people walk into AC Lounge and say, I never knew this was here." Gary says about the sign and how it attracts new visitors. "Ian from Creative Juices Signage built it. I told him we really had to have this sign in 3D; I didn't want something just up against the wall."

Since the sign was installed in 2014, some might think the lounge is new but it has been around for a long time.

"May 12, 2004 is when we opened the doors." Gary explains.

Back in 2004 he and his partners Paulo Emanuel and Richard Rosenblatt built the lounge from the remnants of an old bar in the neighborhood.

"I got dragged into it." Gary remembers while describing what lead to his partnership in the business.

"My best friend Paulo lived in Los Angeles at the time. He owned and operated a very famous bar in San Diego called The Green Circle Bar. Paulo suggested checking out this place that was available."

"The bar was called Our Place Bar and Grill. It was sketch. It was patronized by pimps and hookers... but there was a guy in there named Tyrese, and he was the MC for karaoke nights. He would do Dionne Warwick songs, and it was so fun."

Gary adds, "I reported back to Paulo and I told him 'It's got all of

the bones of a good bar.' The owner was in trouble and had to get rid of it. Paulo said, 'G let's do this' – and I told him no for two months. Then, one day I woke up and thought, I need to do this."

At that time, They probably didn't think that AC Lounge would still be going strong 13+ years later. In the beginning they took over the lease and eventually they bought the building. Now, Gary and his wife Kimberly are the only owners.

"I do other things, I do community work." Gary answers when asked about other projects. "I'm a member of Rotary International at

"I love this whole area. From here to Kensington is the greatest attraction in the city to me – cool, wonderful people and good businesses."

the Old Mission Rotary chapter. My wife and I also put on a free concert series in Allied Gardens Community Park, with about 2,500 people, it's called Allied Gardens First Fridays Summer Concerts in the Park. We do five events during the summer. All that and we're raising two children."

Kimberly also runs her own business close by.

"My wife's day spa business is right behind us, it's called The Rockefeller Center. She's an esthetician by trade: hair, nails, waxing, cosmetics. My wife works really hard – you're limited by how much money you can make in one day being an esthetician – so soon we'll be working together on developing her own line of skin care products, and selling them online."

So the lounge not only serves as an entertainment venue, it also serves as home base for their businesses.

"I love how this has worked. Gary adds, "I like have my little HQ right here."

Most of our discussion involves the fact that Gary has seen this Normal Heights neighborhood change right along with his lounge over the years. From the area's past percep-



Kimberly and Gary John

tion of being sort of a sketchy place at night and overpopulated with antique shops along Adams Avenue. Antique Row was mostly just a place where few would consider going out at night. Now, many years later, the area known by many simply as "30th and Adams" boasts numerous

restaurants, coffee shops and other small businesses.

"I'm glad they got rid of that Antique Row name, Gary says about the current Adams

Avenue area. "There's so much more to it now. There's businesses that are not just restaurants, it's a really cool evolution from what this area used to be."

The area is a little tough to define. Is it Normal Heights or is it North Park?

"From a city point of view, I'm in the North Park community plan." Gary adds, "I'm part of the Adam's Avenue business Association, which is in Normal Heights. 'I kind of dance with whoever is dressed prettier that day.' He jokes.

"Fortunately for me, now what's happening is '30th and Adams' has a bigger name so it's easier to tell people that and they say, 'Oh I love 30th and Adams.'" He continues, "I love this whole area. From here to Kensington is the greatest attraction in the city to me – cool, wonderful people and good businesses."

The Air Conditioned Lounge has been there all this time, making its mark in early evenings for happy hours and special events, and not so quietly late into the night.

It's an excellent place to just hang out and watch a game during the early evening, but at night you'll find many different styles of dance music during any of the regular events.

Sundays are for Chvrch, Mondays are Organized Grime, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays feature various monthly events, one of the most recent being DJ 1979's new party Retro Box on the second Thursday of each month. Fridays are called House Music Fridays with resident DJ Matthew Brian and his fellow local DJs and guests. Saturdays are Juicy with Mike Czech who has been a DJ at AC Lounge for more than ten years. Besides music and dancing they have great happy hours, unique, local, craft brews and the friendly bartenders make some of the best cocktails you can get in the city.

"I'm opening a patio in the back. Gary answers when asked about what the future holds for the lounge. "It will be thematically like James Bond Goes Glamping. It's gonna have a couple of cool features, no music, just the sounds of fountains and streaming water. We'll be serving food via food trucks."

"The evolution of AC is that it's moving into a space where I can host business events." Gary adds, "I used to work at a company called Corporate Alliance in 2012-2014. I got a great education on hosting business events and the power of helping people build relationships. That's where I think it will go next. You know, you've been around for so long as a nightclub. You can't put lightning back in a bottle, you're not going to be the hot spot anymore so you have to evolve in a smart way."

For more information on Gary and Kimberly's businesses visit air-conditionedlounge.com and therockefellercenter.com

Read more online about the ambience, artwork and how it was built, with info on some of the staff at:

LocalUmbrellaMedia.com/nightlife