

The Indigo Room wins 2008 Blue Chip Community Business Award

For more than 13 years, Raimond Aulen has wrestled with reams of red tape, tons of construction debris, shifting governmental priorities and regulations and volatile economic conditions, yet has continued to keep his bar, The Indigo Room, up and running. For overcoming such adversities, The Indigo Room has won the 2008 Southwest Florida Blue Chip Community Business Award.



Raimond Aulen, owner of The Indigo Room, won this year's Blue Chip Community Business Award.

The program, coordinated and sponsored by Oswald Trippe and Company, recognizes successful small businesses and shares their stories as models for other entrepreneurs.

For Mr. Aulen, the challenges began before he even opened. Unable to find a landlord willing to rent space to a bar and unable to qualify for a bank loan, he took out a private loan, bought a building with numerous code violations and set about fixing the place himself.

"But the neighbors still didn't want me there and code enforcement officials became regular visitors," Mr. Aulen said. "At one point, there were \$100,000 in liens against the building."

Still, Mr. Aulen opened in 1995 with a beer and wine license, adding a full liquor license about 18 months later when finances improved.

In 1998, the city tore up Patio de Leon (which adjoins the building) with plans to develop it, but stopped in the middle, leaving piles of dirt and construction

debris everywhere. Frustrated by the lack of progress and the obstacle it posed to his business, Aulen ordered the bricks himself. The city eventually bought the bricks from him and installed them.

Three years later, the city banned those younger than 21 from downtown bars, causing an immediate 30 percent drop in foot traffic. Some clubs closed, although Mr. Aulen managed to keep The Indigo Room open, relying on his regular clientele and new customers displaced from the bars that shut down.

Mr. Aulen attributes his survival to a number of factors, among them making improvements as he could afford them rather than amassing a lot of debt.

"I didn't do it for recognition," Mr. Aulen said, "but out of a belief that it was important and the right thing to do. In retrospect, I can see that it helped business by improving my image, although I didn't do it for that reason." ■

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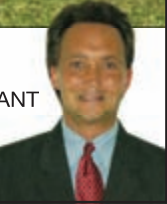


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