

Flashy nightclub rises in the sticks

Owners hope
name talent
will be magnet

By DARLENE STINSON

There's no one on center stage now except bustling workers with their pockets full of nails.

But next Tuesday the stage will come alive with lights and the razzmatazz of bigtime show biz.

The place is Center Stage, an entertainment complex which promoters liken to no concert hall or bar in southeastern Michigan.

When completed, the nightclub in semi-rural Canton Township will have tiers of tables, five bar stations, private viewing chambers and a broad center stage on which nationally-known entertainers will perform.

The Center Stage has already booked a string of names that includes Stephen Stills, Waylon Jennings and The Lettermen.

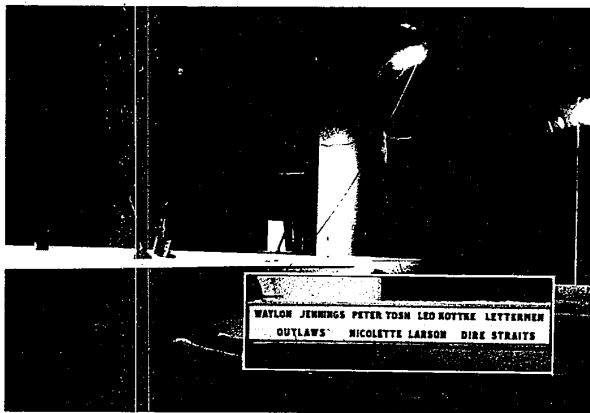
CO-OWNER, DON Soenen of Plymouth said he and his partners—Bernie Jackson and Jack Hirschauer also of Plymouth—and Joseph Hoffman of Bloomfield—didn't start out to build a nightclub from the ground up.

But the investors, who also own a popular bar in Westland, were unable to find a building anywhere in the Detroit area that could be converted into an acoustically high-quality nightclub without costly renovations.

Instead they opted to put up their own building on a site in Canton Township, midway between Detroit and Ann Arbor, with easy access to I-275, I-96 and I-94.

The rock band Spirit will star at the club's opening Feb. 20 and 21, followed by the Charlie Daniels Band on Feb. 22, blues guitarist Muddy Waters on Feb. 26 and acoustic guitarist Leo Kottke on March 1.

Other bookings include reggae musician Peter Tosh, jazz musician May-



A workman puts finishing touches to the stage at Center Stage, a soon-to-open cabaret midway between Detroit and Ann Arbor. Outside, the marquee (insert) already beckons for a broad range of customers. (Staff photos by Gary Caskey)

nard Ferguson, singer Nicolette Larson, Jerry Jeff Walker country rock band and rock star Mitch Ryder.

"We're not going to concentrate on any one kind of entertainment," says Glenn Peacock, advertising director for Brass Ring Productions, which has contracted to promote and book entertainers for the nightclub.

"We want to go to the extreme edge of every type of entertainment. We don't want to get caught in the stigma of rock youth concerts."

Peacock has even promised to bring comedians to the club's hardwood-floor stage.

With nearly 20,000 square feet of floor space, the \$2 million nightclub can seat 1,500 patrons on the balcony and the two-tier main floor.

But Soenen says only 1,200 tickets

will be sold for each show in order to create an uncrowded, cozy atmosphere.

"A LOT OF ENTERTAINERS are changing their views on the type of place they want to play in," Soenen said. "The feeling was that this type of place would be appealing to entertainers. We don't want it to look like a concert hall."

Co-owner Hoffman, who is a building contractor, has managed to bring Center Stage to near completion in less than five months.

"Everyone still said that I was too slow," joked Hoffman as carpenters bustled around the building to meet the Feb. 20 opening date.

Soenen and Hoffman are visibly proud of their accomplishment so far. Soenen points to the 26-foot high ex-

posed ceiling that was designed by acoustical engineers and says, "The acoustics ought to be great."

He points out the two rooms where parties can sip their gin and tonics in private. He notes the computerized bar system that will automatically mix drinks and deliver them to five bar stations through underground plastic tubes in three seconds.

Manager Jack Abbate is quick to tell visitors that the company which designed the nightclub's lighting system—A.J. Stokes—was recently nominated for an Emmy Award.

"So what do you think?" is the question asked of visitors as they walk through the building.

Soenen and partners are keeping their fingers crossed that the question is satisfactorily answered on opening night.

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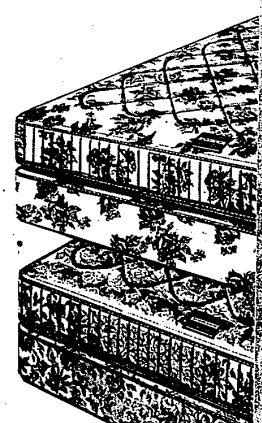
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