

From the Pittsburgh Business Times:

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Club Cafe business sold to owner of Opus One Productions

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times - by [Tim Schooley](#)

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After taking a classic art deco night club that dated to the 1930s and turning it into a performance venue with the kind of high-tech studio equipment typically found in much larger halls, Marco and Paula Cardamone and their partners have sold the Club Cafe business.

They didn't go far to find a buyer, choosing **Michael Sanders**, owner of Millvale-based Opus One Productions, which has been booking acts at Club Cafe on the South Side.

"We had quite a few offers over the last few years to sell the club, but we've been working with Mike for the past four years," said Marco Cardamone, whose family closed the former **Cafe Allegro** across the street from Club Cafe two years ago and has been working to sell it.

"Mike's one of the few up-and-up entrepreneurs with integrity in the music business. He's a straight shooter, and he's a guy with a vision."

Terms of the sale were not disclosed. The sale included only the business, not the property.

Cardamone said he expects Sanders to carry on the tradition of Club Cafe that his group's ownership has established over the past 12 years. Under their ownership, Club Cafe was an intimate live music venue that hosted a wide variety of national recording artists, including a range

of singer songwriters typically heard on public radio station WYEP, located nearby.

Sanders said he doesn't expect to change much, adding the biggest change so far is installing a 15-beer tap system at the Club Cafe's bar to be able to offer more craft beers.

"Certainly, since the very beginning, Marco and his team have established a certain thing here," Sanders said. "We're obviously going to continue that. The reputation is great."

He said his Opus One Productions typically books 250 to 300 acts per year at Club Cafe, which is open four or five days a week. He doesn't expect that to change much.

Nor does Sanders see any change for the broader business of Opus One, which books 450 to 500 acts each year, also representing Mr. Smalls Funhouse in Millvale and Brillobox in Bloomfield.

Terri Sokoloff, a principal of Ross-based restaurant services company **Specialty Group**, who represented the business for sale, expects Sanders will bring new energy to running the business.

"You need someone hands on to run a place like that," she said.

Cardamone plans to devote more time to his main business, South Side-based **Merging Media**, a digital media company he said was busy at the moment.

The sale marks the end of what was an integrated strategy between Merging Media and Club Cafe, in which the club's studio production capabilities enabled it to create live concert DVDs of its visiting performers, as well as a Club Cafe Live television show that aired on **Comcast** a few years ago.

Cardamone said he has great memories of the performers that have played at Club Cafe, often as unknown newcomers who later became famous, including **Norah Jones** and **John Mayer**, who played for a crowd of eight people in the 150-capacity club on a snowy evening in 2001.

Rick Belloli, executive director of the **South Side Local Development Co.**, called Club Cafe a tremendous asset to the neighborhood.

"Anytime any business is sold, it gives you a moment to pause and reflect on what it means to the neighborhood," Belloli said.

"Seeing Opus One stepping forward and taking a more active role ... is great. I think it's a really strong endorsement of Club Cafe and of the South Side."

Club Cafe

Music nightclub

ADDRESS: 56-58 S. 12th St., South Side

MENU: Selection of cocktails and beer, appetizers, paninis, pizza and wraps

WEBSITE: www.clubcafelive.com

Tim Schooley covers retail, real estate, small business, hospitality and media. Contact