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Could the Brillobox reopen under new ownership? Closed Bloomfield club goes up for sale

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The Covid-19 pandemic may have inspired the current owners of the popular Penn Avenue club Brillobox to close after a 15-year run.

But as the business goes up for sale, that doesn't mean a new buyer may not opt to take on the operation and keep it going under what's become a well-established brand.

Terri Sokoloff, principal of Ross-based Specialty Group, recently began marketing the business for sale in which a new owner would pay a list price of \$290,000 for the business and all it includes, excluding the real estate, and then take over the terms of an established lease.

She acknowledged a range of possibilities for Brillobox, which long thrived on the edge of Bloomfield and Lawrenceville, featuring a variety of vegetarian and vegan food and hosting a broad selection of local bands along with national independent acts.

"I'm not sure when we're done with this if it will be a Brillobox or something else," said Sokoloff. "We've heard from some folks that they'd like the Brillobox to remain."

To be sure, the business just went up for sale and there's yet to be any definitive deal for it.

Sokoloff, who recalls handling the original deal when Brillobox first opened, left little doubt that the decision to close was a Covid-19-inspired retirement by its current owners, Lou Ickes and Jenessa Walter, who told over ownership about four years ago.

The business generated an ample portion of its business from hosting live events on its 1,600-square-foot second floor, a business model that's largely been decimated by restrictions from the pandemic that limit crowds and social distancing.

"This closing is 110 percent because of the pandemic," she said.

The decimation of live music venues is concerning enough that Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto issued a letter of support to congress in favor of three pieces of federal legislation that would provide support to independent music and entertainment venues and theaters threatened by the pandemic.

The decision to close by the pandemic is one of a number of motivated retirements Sokoloff is woking with right now by owners looking to sell instead of struggling though a business environment badly



TIM SCHOOLEY

Brillobox on Penn Avenue in Bloomfield, now up for sale after its owners recently announced it was closing permanently after a 15-year run.

damaged by the pandemic and its related restrictions.

Sokoloff also is working to sell Salonika's Bar & Grill which continues to operate downtown whose owner Takis Kontoulis has been convinced to retire as business has deteriorated in the central business district.

The proposition for a potential buyer is whether they can rebuild a business on the other side of the pandemic and bring new energy to an establishment that has already generated a following.

That maybe the case with Coca Cafe, a brunch cornerstone on Butler Street for 18 years, which Specialty Group listed for sale in May.

Sokoloff reports her firm has been in advanced talks with a potential buyer interested in keeping Coca Cafe and improving the Lawrenceville restaurant, yet provided no further details on any impending deal.

"If you're just starting out, I think you're a little more adaptable to everything," she said.

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