

Orlando  
Sentinel

# Money

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MAY 10, 2001

## Church Street Station changes are under way

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The new owner of Church Street Station has moved quickly to shut down money-losing elements but might take up to three months to complete a plan to revitalize the ailing downtown entertainment and shopping complex.

Nineteen employees lost their jobs Tuesday at the Terror on Church Street haunted house along with a disc jockey at the Phineas Phogg's nightclub, which was recently renamed Club Confessions.

Another 12 club employees were given positions elsewhere on the property, said Daryl M. Carter, one of the

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— DARYL M. CARTER

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new owners in the venture.

The partnership, which includes Orlando developer Robert I. Kling and veteran real estate investor Maury Carter, on Friday bought the complex in the heart of the city's historic district from Enic PLC of London. The group, F.F. South & Co., paid \$15.9 million — \$12.9 million in cash and a \$3 million two-year note.

In a statement Wednesday, the new owners said the closings were necessary steps "in preparation for future changes" and that "more explicit plans will be forthcoming."

Daryl Carter, 38, the son of Maury Carter, 68, said he thinks it will take 90 days to develop a complete plan.

"We're still in an information-gathering mode," Carter said. "We don't want to make a lot of wholesale changes prematurely,

because everything is interrelated."

Enic, which paid \$11.5 million in April 1999, said the operation was losing about \$2 million a year.

Business and public relations specialists said that although shutting down struggling elements makes financial sense, it also creates a "first impression" image problem.

For example, when Enic acquired the business, it abruptly fired the signature jazz band and made other cuts without offering any positive changes.

High-profile operations such as Church Street Station have their decisions scrutinized, said Lori Booker, co-owner of Carlman Booker Reis Public Relations firm in Maitland.

"I would have announced the negatives and some positives at the same time," Booker said. "You have to try to package

something."

Todd Persons, a veteran Orlando public relations executive who served as Mayor Bill Frederick's press secretary from 1980-84 during Church Street Station's heyday, said the project always attracted more attention than its relatively small size might merit.

That's partly because its opening in 1974, Persons said, "represented the rebirth of downtown."

Now with more apartments and hotels opening in the downtown area and the potential for more development west of Interstate 4, Persons said, Church Street Station's future could be bright despite the loss of its tourist base to competitors.

Tourists from the outskirts of London were enjoying soft drinks on the street-side patio at Church Street Station on Wednesday and wondered why

there were so few patrons.

"If there was something like this in England, it would be swamped," said Brian Harrison. "It's lovely," said his wife, Diane.

The Harrisons said they were not part of a tour group and knew nothing of Church Street Station until they stumbled across a brief reference to it in a brochure in their Orlando hotel room.

Workers at Church Street Station, which employs about 400 people, said the mood still was upbeat Wednesday despite the closing of the Terror attraction, which never rebounded from its move from Orange Avenue in late 1999.

"It was hopeless," one employee said of the haunted house.

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