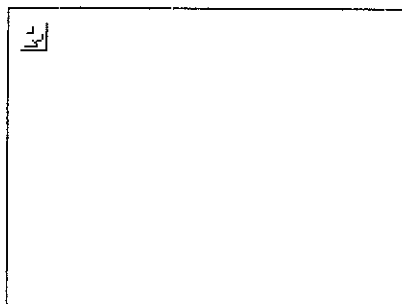


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BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (AP) - Once among the most vibrant entertainment districts in the Twin Cities, the Mall of America's fourth floor is now nearly deserted, the windows of formerly successful bars covered in black plastic

"What the hell happened up here?" asked Marc Berridge, a visitor from Fort Wayne, Ind , as he peered into an empty room littered with soda cans and cigarette butts

Up until the late 1990s, the fourth floor was an attractive draw for Twin Cities residents and tourists alike. Patrons could line-dance at a country-and-western bar, gyrate to hip-hop music, watch a stand-up comedian or a movie, or relax and enjoy a good meal

But the fourth floor suffered what was perhaps a final blow last week when three of its venues - Jillian's Hi-Life Lanes, Player's Bar & Grill and America's Original Sports Bar - abruptly shut their doors to the public. All three were owned by Dave & Buster's, a Dallas-based operators of restaurants and entertainment complexes.

Retail analysts say a number of factors contributed to the fourth floor's decline, including increased competition from downtown clubs, and a 2004 Bloomington ordinance that banned smoking in most public places.

Whatever the cause, visitors to the fourth floor now have exactly two entertainment options: A meal at Hooters, or a movie.

"This used to be a place where, if you wanted to, you could make a night of it," said Eric Steiner, 20, of St. Paul, a machinist in the U.S. Navy. "Now it's dead."

Part of the problem, analysts say, is that much of the recreation on the fourth floor - movies, bowling and dancing - could be found elsewhere, including in other suburban malls. While the Mall of America has become one of the nation's largest incubators of new retail concepts, it was never able to establish a similar role in nighttime entertainment.

"They never got an anchor tenant that was truly unique, that would drive people to go there," said Andrea Christenson, a vice president with real estate consultant Colliers Turley Martin Tucker.

Nighttime entertainment and shopping malls have never been an easy mix, according to retail experts. Malls thrive on the ability to create a safe family atmosphere, which can drive away the young people needed to make nightclubs thrive.

The mall tried to play it safe from the beginning, analysts said, with most of the entertainment venues focused on food - even though that was readily available in other parts of the mall. In addition, the fourth floor area was isolated from the rest of the mall, and many visitors didn't even know it was there.

While the fourth floor is a dark spot, the rest of the mall is thriving. It continues to attract more tourists each year than Disney World, the Grand Canyon and Graceland combined.

In 2005, more stores and restaurants have opened than in any year since it opened in 1992. It features trendy fashion stores like Club Monaco, Tommy Bahama, Metropark and Sephora that are difficult or impossible to find at other malls. Another hot retailer, H&M of Sweden, opens a store in September.

"The whole energy of the mall is around Camp Snoopy and the shops," said William Kowinski, author of "The Malling of America," a social and cultural critique of malls. "The fourth level is really isolated and very different from the rest of the mall."

Wiggies, Inc. Comparisons:

August	2004	2005	Difference	% Change
Employee Wages	6139.51	5003.75	-1135.76	-18.5%
Officer Wages	2300.00	600.00	-1700.00	-73.9%
Sales Tax Paid	1837.06	1191.50	-645.56	-35.1%

Wiggies Comparisons:

July	2004	2005	Difference	% Change
Employee Wages	7,077.01	6,025.82	-1051.19	-14.9%
Officer Wages	3,400.00	1,700.00	-1700.00	-50.0%
Sales Tax Paid	1,861.91	1,233.63	-628.28	-33.7%