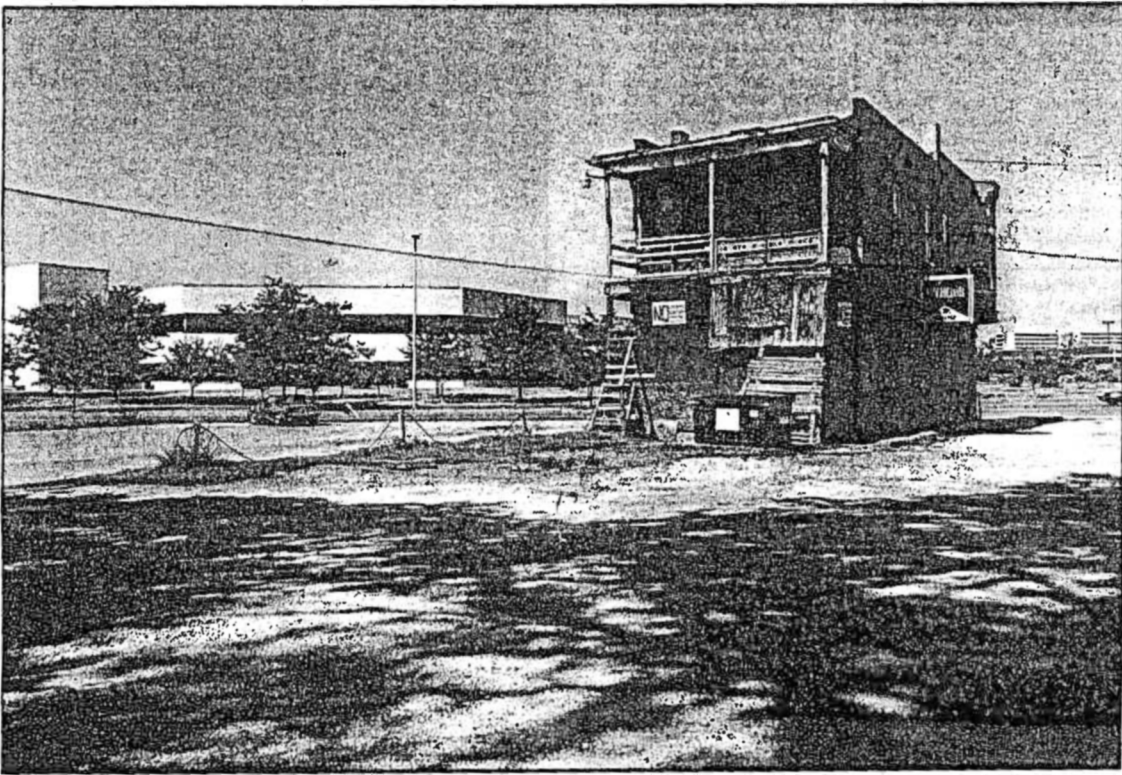


From prostitution to parking



FRED ZWICKY/Journal Star

The Scorpio Lounge, along Southwest Jefferson Avenue between Walnut Street and Kumpf Boulevard, sits on land reportedly sought by Caterpillar Inc. Other properties also are targeted in

the South Side block that was once notorious for prostitution so Caterpillar can build a parking lot for workers at its track-type tractor center, sources say.

'Merry-go-round' on last lap

□ Caterpillar looking to pave remaining businesses and put up a parking lot

By MICHAEL SMOTHERS

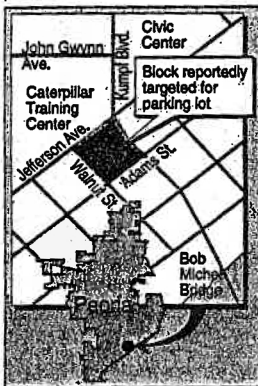
of the Journal Star

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PEORIA — The city's older and retired cops recall the Flamingo tavern across from the former police headquarters where they'd unwind after a late shift.

Next to it was the Slipper Club, where fights and shootings were almost as nightly as the dice games outside the back door.

Alvin Richards' Alligator Bar & Grill drew a cleaner clientele for a few years, but said the crowd that frequents the Scorpio Lounge down the alley scared them away.



The block as a whole was part of the infamous "merry-go-round," where street prostitutes plied their trade with

customers seeking them out along the four streets that border it. That business, too, is gone.

By late next year, the entire block itself may be nothing more than a memory.

Caterpillar Inc. is in the process of contacting owners of remaining businesses and properties within it to buy them out. It wants to raze and pave the block for a parking lot, sources said Friday.

"Yeah, it's evidently true," Richards said. He already has sold his interest in the property housing the Alligator at 508 Walnut St. to Caterpillar and will close the business when his liquor license expires in March.

Another person with property interests in the block — bordered by Southwest Adams Street, Jefferson Avenue, Walnut Street and Kumpf Boulevard — confirmed he's

negotiating with Caterpillar but declined to comment further.

Another tavern on the block, the Tu Dor Tap at 511 SW Adams, also is targeted by Caterpillar, sources said. But its owner, Violet Giovinna, said she hasn't heard from the company.

Caterpillar reportedly wants to build a parking lot for the influx of employees it's assigning to its refurbished training center on Southwest Jefferson, now known as the company's track-type tractor center.

Caterpillar officials declined to comment on the company's reported purchase efforts. But one source said it hopes to complete its deals by late next year.

It was not known Friday if Caterpillar also might seek

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the storage facility owned by Peoria Rescue Ministries at Walnut and Adams, on property that once held the Flamingo

and Slipper Club. Nor were its plans for a CILCO substation on the block along Walnut available.

Richards said he couldn't overcome the street gang presence and intermittent violence

that continued to plague the block.

"I did everything; I mean everything," he said, but the Cajun restaurant and jazz nightclub he opened in July 1991 eventually became merely a nightclub, "and I didn't want to be in that business."