

ORANGE ENDS REDEVELOPMENT PACT FOR "THE MINT"

BY WALTER ELLIOTT

ORANGE - The future of the former Peppermint Lounge at 169-77 Central Ave. remains unclear since the City of Orange Township has dissolved a redevelopment agreement with Mighty Fortress, LLC July 20.

The address, still bearing "The Mint" signage, stands boarded up July 28 while contractors for Essex County install new sidewalks. The boarded-up two-story building is unchanged since its 1997 closure.

The six Municipal Council members unanimously voted a resolution that immediately rescinded and terminated the redevelopment agreement with Mighty Fortress. 169-77 still lies within the city's Central Orange Redevelopment Area.

A July 28 check of the 2010 Tax Assessor's rolls shows that the lounge and its .8838 acre lot are owned by Love of Jesus Ministries. A subsequent call to Love of Jesus Senior Pastor Jason Alvarez has not been returned as of 4 p.m. July 28.

The council's redevelopment dissolution ends a two year saga there for Love of Jesus Ministries. The ministry, through its Mighty

Fortress redevelopment arm, had bought the property in 2008 for a conversion to a mini shopping plaza.

The tax assessor's rolls have the site listed as being built

Lounge, recognizable for its red-and-white striped awning and signage, after 1970. Bekrag was still next door. The neighborhood included Brick Church Buick, Huffman-Koos



in 1913. A search of Price & Lee's Real Estate Directory of Orange's volumes has the place as two adjoining buildings - including a gasoline wholesaler's offices - in 1948.

171 Central Ave. was converted into a luncheonette for Harriet Marra by 1965. Bekrag Auto Imports - a repair garage for European cars - had moved into 177 Central Ave.

177-79 Central Ave. became the Peppermint

furniture and Goodyear and Firestone tire stores.

The lounge, at least in The Mint incarnation, was a known jazz band hangout.

Musicians, barkeeps and patrons meanwhile saw the neighborhood change. Huffman-Koos became a King's Supermarket and a Walgreen's pharmacy. Brick Church Buick, Bekrag and Firestone closed. Compass Lincoln-Mercury and Route 280 Auto came and went.

The Mint closed in 1997. Some of its musicians moved to The Crossroads Restaurant in Garwood, central Union County.

The Love of Jesus Church still holds three properties: the former Congregational Church of Orange edifice at 448 Highland Ave. plus two residential properties on Mountainview Avenue. The church, last year, had an interest in a lot on the northeast corner of Mountainview and Lincoln avenues; it had a drawing of a two story house-like structure for spiritual purposes on display.

Love of Jesus, on its Web site history page, began in Jason and Gail Alvarez's home. The nondenominational church later moved to the Belleville VFW Hall and a second Washington Avenue address in the early 1980s before learning that the Highland Avenue Congregational Church was up for sale in 1985.

The congregational church, which also went by the Orange Valley Congregational Church name, was founded in 1857 and its Gothic fieldstone sanctuary built in 1860. Declining membership prompted dissolution in 1983.