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Closing of Paddock end of era

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kinds of people from the gay community," says Patrick Enderle, a former manager at the club.

"One of the things I liked best about the place was the broad spectrum of people — all ages, all walks of life. It wasn't just one group. Younger and older, customers who were janitors and customers who were heart surgeons. There was always kind of a down-home appeal. It wasn't unusual to see a heart surgeon talking to a person who flipped burgers at McDonald's."

Ebony Summers, the former show host at the Paddock and a well-known drag performer throughout the Carolinas, is equally enthusiastic about her time spent at the club.

"I was there for eight years," she recalls with a touch of melancholy. "I heard about it from a couple of straight girlfriends."

"Back then I had never heard of or even seen a drag show and these friends managed to get me out to see one — the first person I ever saw was Scarlett Dailey, who actually turned out to be one of my best friends. The show was so awesome it blew me away!"

"I knew right then that that was what I wanted to do, so I went backstage and talked to her after the show. She was so nice, but then everybody there was. That's just the kind of place the Paddock was."

Summers went on to become a regular performer at the club — eventually snagging the job of show host.

"I was doin' it every weekend," she professes. "It really didn't hit me until after the last show — it was later — that I realized it was a time that was over. Nothing will ever feel like home now that the Paddock is gone."

Jordan, Summers and Enderle are all in agreement about the club's weekly drag reviews.

"Oh my god," Summers boasts. "It was probably one of the best places to do drag. You didn't feel pressure. You felt very laid back. You can ask any of the queens that performed here — the Paddock always made you feel welcome."

"We were known all over the state for our production numbers," Jordan says. "Female impersonation was really a big deal at the Paddock. We've had a local house cast and we always brought in acts from all over, like Kirby Kolby, Dana St. James and Chevelle Brooks."

In fact, the club's focus on drag performance dates back to 1978, when the Paddock

hosted the first annual Miss Greenville America Pageant. Local female impersonators competed for the title of Miss North Carolina America, which was also held at The Paddock that year. The Miss North Carolina America Pageant eventually moved on to Durham and then to Charlotte. According to Jordan, "Miss Greenville is still one of the most coveted titles in the America system."

It comes as no surprise that the Paddock would also serve as a source of fun and entertainment for many outside the LGBT community.

"It was like a college bar in many ways," says Summers.

"We would get people from [East Carolina] University that

were not gay but just wanted to have the experience. In the summer it would be slow but in the winter and fall all kinds of people would be in here.

"I remember one year the anchor people from WNCT News came in quite a bit until their station manager told them they didn't need to be spending so much time in a gay bar!"

News anchors weren't the only celebrities that made an appearance at the Paddock. Actress Sandra Bullock, once a student at East Carolina, was a frequent patron and reportedly even took part in a few drag numbers as a back-up dancer.

Although there are hopes that the Paddock might open again in another location, there are currently no plans in the works. A handful of emails came to Q-Notes following the closing lamenting the club's untimely demise — Jordan's words were particularly poignant:

"Although the club has closed and the Paddock family may be down, we are not out for the count. The friendships made will continue and we will carry the legacy of The Paddock Club forward with us wherever we may go. We may no longer gather on Friday and Saturday nights at 1008-B Dickinson Ave., but in the end it is just a building and we will forever keep the legacy of The Paddock Club alive in our hearts."



Ebony Summers:
'Nothing will ever feel like home now that the Paddock is gone.'

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