

ACCENT

Retired rail workers relive the good ol' days at N.C. museum site

By JIM WRINN
State and National Editor

SPENCER — When the Southern Railway shops here closed in 1960, machinist J.S. Upton never believed he would return to the buildings where he worked for 49 years.

But Upton, 91, relives the old days each Wednesday with other retired railroaders who gather at Spencer Shops, under restoration by the state as a transportation museum.

"I worked there when the shops ran 24 hours a day," Upton said of the complex built in 1896, when he was 5 years old. "When I first came to work for Southern Railway, they had saturated steam locomotives, and when I left, I repaired diesel locomotives."

The transition from steam to diesel power was a prime cause in closing the shops, because it took fewer men to maintain the newer locomotives than to service the 75 coal-fired engines that passed through Spencer Shops daily.

"We rebuilt the steam engines from the wheels up," said Upton, who overhauled and fitted the huge cylinders that powered steam locomotives. "The boilers had to be overhauled every so often, but with the diesels, all you had to do was put in new gears."

Each of the thousands of pieces of machinery which made up a 300-ton steam locomotive were forged at Spencer Shops. All of the maintenance was done in Spencer.

"It was just a railroad town in its hey day," Upton remembered. "There were no businesses but the mercantile stores and the YMCA where the railroad men slept between runs and the shopmen ate."

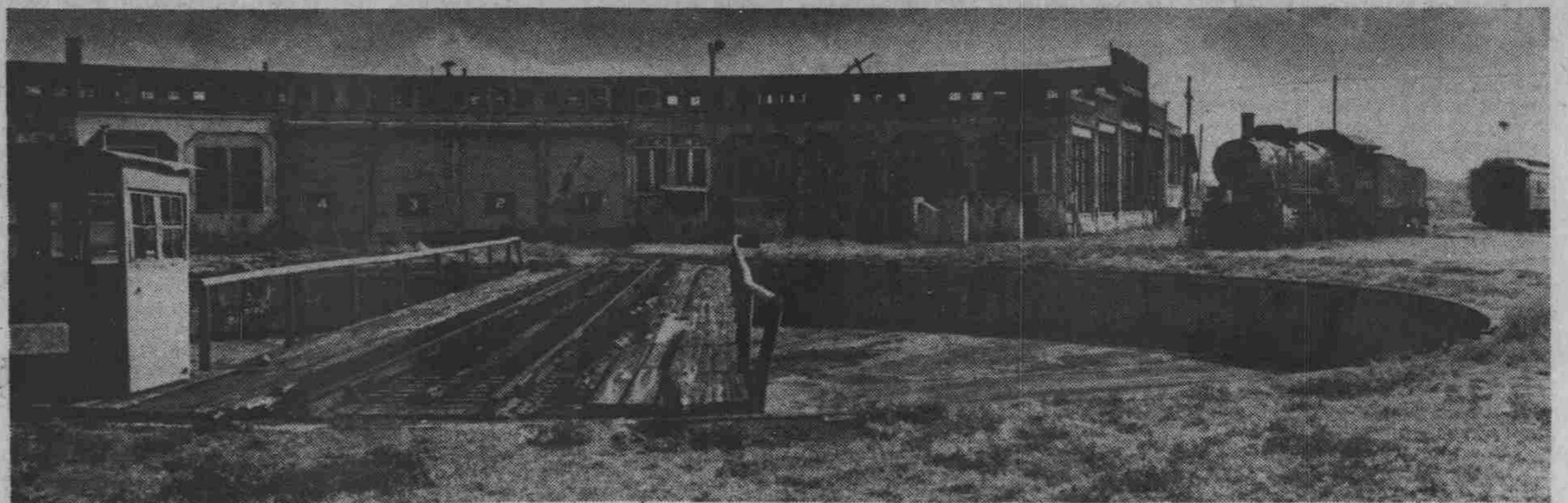
When the shops closed more than two decades ago, so did most of tiny Spencer, population less than 3,500. But North Carolina's plans for a transportation museum could open up a new chapter in Spencer's history and for the shops which have literally fallen apart in the weed-grown complex right in the middle of town.

"I thought that would be the end of the place when it was closed," Upton said. "But now I'm over at the museum every Wednesday morning at 10 o'clock when 10 or 12 of us retirees shoot the breeze."

"We talk about women, politics and, of course, the railroad. It was a good life on the railroad. Everyday was something different."

The shops, located just north of Salisbury on the railroad's Washington-Atlanta mainline, employed almost 2,500 men like Upton at one time. And during the busy days of World War II, Upton remembered that upwards of 45 trains left Spencer daily.

But in recent years, after the trains quit stopping, the 54 acres of shops deteriorated quickly, and the railroad considered demolishing the crumbling buildings. But Southern donated the site to the state in 1978, and soon after the N.C. General Assembly appropriated



Old Southern Railway roundhouse and steam locomotive in Spencer N.C. wait for state's restoration plan to begin ... railroad company donated the 54-acre site to the state in 1978, to be turned into transportation museum

money to begin the long, slow process of creating a living museum from old, decaying structures.

"Most of what we're doing right now is trying to stabilize or preserve what we've got and not let it get any worse," Don Wooten, director of the state's Historic Spencer Shops, said recently.

A 6,000-square-foot exhibit area is scheduled to open by Christmas in the restored Master Mechanic's office, now a visitor's center and the retired railroaders' meeting spot.

Southern, other railroad companies and train enthusiasts have donated several ancient locomotives to the museum. But the main concern today is restoring the old buildings — where hundreds of steam locomotives were maintained prior to 1953 — so there will be a display place for the equipment.

While railroad locomotive and cars are a staple at the museum, Wooten said

other types of land, air and sea transportation would be included.

"A lot of people think we're just a railroad museum," he said. "We're concerned with preserving all forms of North Carolina transportation history, from cars to canoes, all the way back to the early plank roads and covered wagons."

The state has already invested \$1 million for the restoration which is expected to take at least five more years. During its summer 1982 session, the General Assembly provided an additional \$100,000.

"The state is keeping the project alive, slowly developing it," said Virgil Smithers, interpretations specialist for the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources. Monies have reinforced the roundhouse and car shop walls, replaced a roof on the huge back shop and fenced the site. But much more must be done before the museum will be ready for visitors.

Several rusty, worn-out steam locomotives must be restored, rickety tracks have to be reconditioned, and weed-choked fields must be cleared.

"The money's been coming in piecemeal," Smithers said. "We've got about \$4 million in land and artifacts, and it's hard to restore it all overnight."

The displays set to open late this year are primarily audio-visual shows and small transportation artifacts. And more is planned.

Airplanes and cars would be exhibited inside the back shop as large as two football fields, once both have been restored. And the roundhouse is capable of displaying up to 37 railroad locomotives which would be repaired in view of the public.

"It would be a wonderful interpretational museum," Wooten said. "It's unusual for any state historic site."

Of course, a live steam locomotive will transport visitors around the site, blowing its whistle and sending black smoke into the air, a scene familiar in Spencer 40 years ago.

But until the restoration is finished, Spencer's locomotives will remain silent as mile-long Southern freights rumble by within sight of the museum. Visitors can wander about the site from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday after checking in at the Master Mechanic's office. And they can view the displays soon to be opened.

"I'm glad the state's got it," railroader Upton said. "But it'll be a slow process to get it done up right."

"I know it won't be like the old days, when you rebuilt steam engines, but it'll be a good place for people to go to remember the past. And it's already a good place to spin yarns."

Theatre

'Sisters' not average student production

By KAREN ROSEN
Staff Writer

"When we chose it, it raised a lot of eyebrows among my colleagues," said Gregory Boyd, director of *Three Sisters*, the department of dramatic art's first production of the season.

"With the possible exception of *King Lear*, *Three Sisters* is the hardest play to produce," Boyd said. "The 14 major roles are so complex and the play is so long and dense in terms of matter, that most professional productions fall miserably and most student productions are unbearably boring."

But this *Three Sisters* is not your average student production. Graduate students from the department's revamped Professional Training Program make up the core of the cast; and the set, described by Boyd as "astounding," is designed by Peter Gould, one of the hottest designers on Broadway.

Written in 1901, Anton Chekhov's masterpiece may be the greatest play since works by Shakespeare.

The play is about lives in transition, and Boyd said, "the play is about Nothing as a subject matter or as an idea. This sounds depressing, but strangely enough, it's not. It's very funny, silly, depressing, sad — just like life."

Boyd's main reason for selecting the play is more compelling than any warnings to steer clear of the difficult four-act piece.

"It's the most 'family' of plays," he said. "No group of actors who have worked on the play has not been changed by it. Just to open yourself to it, you're bound to be transformed."

The ensemble feeling fostered by the play has bonded the first class in the Professional Training Program and helped bridge the gap between grads and undergrads. The program, taught by resident and visiting PRC artists, consists of intensive training in the technical, imaginative and emotive aspects of acting and leads to a Master of Fine Arts degree.

"Eight months ago I would have been shocked to find out I was going to be in graduate school in North Carolina," John Tyson, who plays Baron Tuzenbach in *Three Sisters*, said. Tyson, 29, was a paid professional actor who played Tom in last year's PRC production of *The Glass Menagerie*.

"There was work I still needed to do and felt this was the environment to do it in," Tyson said. "I wanted to be

in a situation where I wasn't fighting for my daily bread so I could concentrate on my work, and not on getting work."

He has barely had a breather since arriving in Chapel Hill, juggling the role of the baron with that of the barkeep in *Life on the Mississippi* as well as teaching a Drama 35 class.

Kathryn Meisle, a recent graduate of Smith College, was lured to UNC by the new program and the prospect of being in the founding class.

She auditioned in New York for David Rotenberg, PRC's artistic director. Her four-minute audition, composed of a Shakespeare Sonnet and a modern piece, led to an interview. "It (UNC) was the only place I wanted to come to. They wanted to make it a place for thinking actors."

Playing Irina has definitely stretched her brain cells. "It's the most exciting, most difficult acting I've ever done," Meisle said. "It's completely frustrating and completely exhilarating."

"It's scary because at first you don't have the slightest inkling of what to do with it. The play is awe-inspiring: You don't dare touch it. The director helps you dive in."

Caspar Thomson, one of the undergraduates in the play, already had a close association with *Three Sisters* from both the audience and backstage sides. The British junior saw one production seven times — the Royal Shakespeare Company version, while he worked as a publicity assistant.

"Every production to a degree is completely different since the director sheds new light," he said. "Also, I only saw the finished product. Here I worked at it from the beginning."

Thomson said that his character, Solyony, adds the grotesqueness to the play. "He's quite a fun character, and has the best lines in the show, the showstopping lines."

Tyson may someday claim that role, since he wants to play all the major male roles in *Three Sisters*. But he doesn't recommend it for his acting students. He tries to dissuade them from going into the acting business because "I don't want to be responsible for making them unhappy."

Tyson has gotten a lot of pleasure from his career choice. "I get a good laugh almost every day," he said. "I don't know a lot of professions that allow you to have one good laugh every day."

Three Sisters runs today through Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. in Playmakers Theatre.

Former grad student used to juggle classes, but now he's having a ball

By LYNSELY ROLLINS
Staff Writer

He used to juggle a heavy course load, but all that has changed. These days, Ken Kaye has a ball. Kaye is a juggler, and one of the few who do it for a living.

Kaye first tried his hand at juggling seven years ago, when he was a graduate student in political science at UNC trying to keep a grip on his classwork.

"I used to work hard in school — real hard. That's about why I learned to juggle. Can you imagine how good it feels to go outside and space out juggling after you've been typing papers all day?" Kaye said. He used to spend his lunchtimes juggling right outside the Undergraduate Library.

As it turned out, however, Kaye attended school for a very brief time; he had chosen a new career before his first semester of grad school was half over. Instead of devoting his hours to study, he started spending four to five hours a day juggling.

"When I first started juggling, it was real exciting, 'cause I couldn't believe I could do it. I practiced every day, never a day off," Kaye said.

Kaye still practices every day. And he still feels satisfied with his work. But juggling is not quite as exciting for him now as it was when he began. "It changed when it became my job," Kaye said.

He reflected on how it felt to decide to become a professional juggler and on how his decision affected him: "I was almost 24 when I learned to juggle. Learning it when I was older was a problem in some ways, because I had to make choices (between finishing school and continuing to juggle)."

"I didn't have my parents supporting me. I was broke for a while — real broke. I'm not sorry I dropped out of grad school; that was a choice I had to make. I rationalize it and say I appreciate it (juggling) more because it came harder, but sometimes I'm a little jealous of people who started earlier," he said.

When Kaye performs, he blends a festive attitude with frankness and his skill with juggling to create a mood for his audience. Kaye said he liked to perform in street fairs the best, and that almost all of his performances were face-to-face. He has had a few opportunities to do television commercials, but turned them down because he did not want his performances to lose their integrity. Kaye said, "I feel like what I do is special. When a kid sees me juggling, I don't want him to think of a product."

Kaye said he didn't expect to become rich from juggling. "To become rich and famous, I'd have to do more of things I don't want to do — cut my hair, advertise myself, do TV."

But Kaye does not discount all publicity; after all, he has to work for a living, and to do so he must let arts councils, schools and public agencies all around the state know that he juggles professionally. Sometimes he works for shopping malls, which he describes as sort of advertisement. He has

no hard and fast rules about what jobs he will or will not take, but weighs his position "case by case."

Kaye has done a lot of shows on the road since he began juggling. "I had a van for a while, travelling on my own. It sounds romantic, being out on the road, but it's also tiring and lonely, and cops are shoeing you away." He joined a little circus company later, with which he performed and toured the country.

Kaye's mailing address has been Chapel Hill ever since his graduate school days, but he has only been settled here for about four years. Now he does shows around the state.

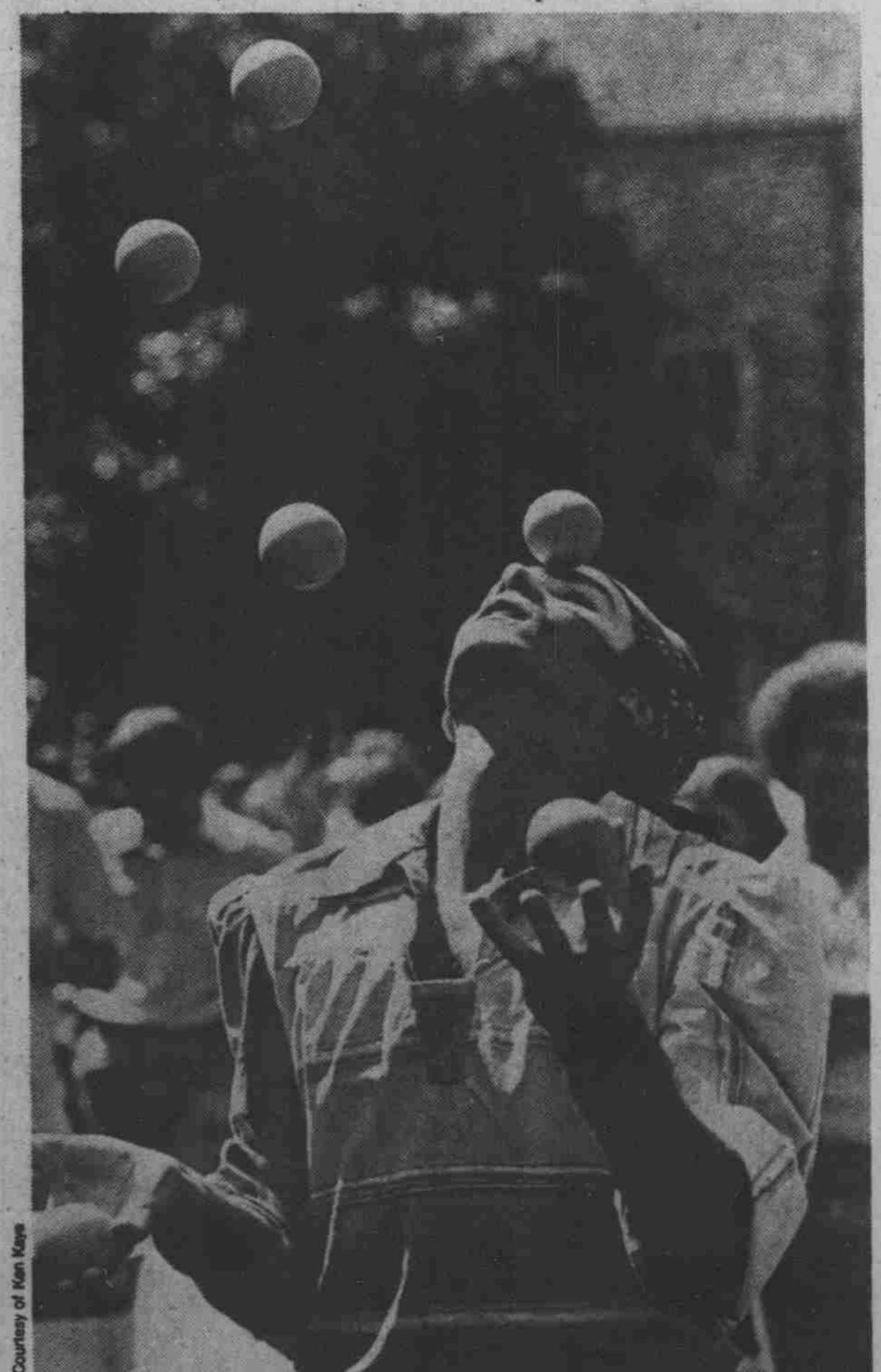
"I've been to some places so many times that everybody knows me there — Fayetteville, even Winston-Salem. I'm performing anywhere from the mountains to the beach," he said. Kaye has enjoyed living at home: "I like being settled — someplace, baking bread and all those things that people do in one place."

But Kaye is planning to move again within the month.

Kaye said that he knew he would always practice and that he would continue to perform on occasion, but that he did not know whether it would remain his occupation. "I might join a performing group," he said. "It's more fun (than performing alone)."

Kaye does not know whether he will return to Chapel Hill after he moves.

It's a toss-up.



Professional juggler Ken Kaye performs for an audience ... UNC student decided that juggling beats grad school

Nightclub's variety key to success

By JO ELLEN MEEKINS
and
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Staff Writers

This past weekend marked the first anniversary of Stephen Barefoot's club, Stephen's...after all. The club opened last Oct. 10th, featuring Broadway star Barbara Cook and receiving attention from the national media.

Barefoot has been dreaming of a club like this for 15 years. They finally were realized last year when he turned a former Oriental restaurant into a stylish supperclub and bar. Stephen's is the supperclub which presents name talent, and after all is a cozy bar and cafe which serves light meals and hosts local talent.

"It took emotional energy to get Stephen's off the ground," said Marnie Carmichael, former artistic director of Stephen's. "Stephen had been dreaming and speculating for about 15 years about starting Stephen's. He has a real flair and

taste for jazz and entertainment," Carmichael said.

Soon the dreaming developed into the search for a space.

"One day we got in the car and went over to look at the space at Kroger Plaza," Carmichael said. Barefoot and Carmichael immediately began visualizing the future stage and bar.

"Practically speaking, the idea of Stephen's was absurd in 1981," Carmichael said.

However, because Chapel Hill has such a variety of people with different tastes, Barefoot believed that the club could survive.

"I felt it was a needed addition because the kind of place I wanted to go (to) didn't exist. The area lacked a combination of a certain caliber of entertainment coupled with a certain atmosphere," Barefoot said.

To keep the club appealing to this area, Barefoot stresses a diversity of entertainment. "We try to keep it varied as we

can. We've worked hard from the beginning not to be a 'type' of club — not a jazz club, etc. The area is too small to be able to support a club in one special area of entertainment."

Barefoot said the entertainment also depended on what the public was willing to support. "We try to get as good a name as we can possibly afford," he said.

The after all section of the club opened the month before the club did, with less fanfare, but as much of an impact on the area's artistic exchange. On any evening it is possible to find a jazz concert, a mellow medley on the piano, or sometimes someone singing — all local talent, and much of it spur of the moment. It all depends, Barefoot said, on how many people (musicians) show up.

"There is an incredible amount of talent in this area," Barefoot said, and his club gives this talent a much-needed outlet. It is possible for anyone in the bar who feels a song coming on to get up and join in.