

Hillsborough Business Center cultivates new companies

By FELISA NEURINGER
Business Editor

The Hillsborough Business Center forms a common bond for a plumbing supply company, a cabinet maker, a mail order business, a woodworking shop, a moving company and an insurance agent.

These are only a few of the 17 businesses housed in the center, located in the old Cone Mills textile plant on Dimmocks Mill Road, said Dolley Hester, the center's property manager.

When the Hillsborough Business Center opened in 1985, it was originally to operate as a business incubator. Incubators are designed to provide a common workplace for aspiring entrepreneurs who want to develop and market new products.

"It would serve as a place for small businesses to start and grow," said Mac Gold, who became the center's sole owner in April of this year.

Gold was part of a group of investors who bought the vacant mill with the intention of turning it into a successful incubator.

"But this proved to be a quick way to lose a lot of money," he said. "Not many brand new businesses were starting up anywhere except Silicon Valley."

All of the other investors pulled out of the venture when it wasn't profitable, but Gold said he decided to stay in. "I felt there were some businesses still existing here that could be served by the Hillsborough Business Center," he said.

Now the majority of the 350,000-square-foot building is occupied by medium-size industries, Gold said. But one portion of the complex remains as an incubator. The 17 companies in the center currently employ more than 150 people.

"At this time, a big portion (of the center) is existing industries using the

center for light manufacturing and distribution," he said. "Some areas are strictly warehouses."

Hester said an owner indicates how much operating space he will need, and Gold then designs the offices to meet the tenant's needs.

The center had a 15 percent occupancy rate during the second quarter of this year, Gold said. "We have grown to 60 percent occupancy rate in the last six months since the basic philosophy (of the center) has been changed," he added.

Businesses are run independently. "It's impossible to cater to every business' individual needs," he said.

In an incubator, businesses share common elements, such as secretaries, in addition to sharing the building.

But at the Hillsborough Business Center, tenants share only heating systems, hallways, bathrooms and parking lots, Gold said.

Small to medium-size businesses find the cost-effectiveness of locating in the center to be very attractive.

J.J. Supply Co., a wholesaler of pipe valves and fittings based in Toledo, Ohio, moved a branch of its business into the complex two months ago, said Mark Kosmider, company vice president.

"It had the best combination of factors — the convenience of (being near) interstates, an available pipeyard and plenty of inside storage space," he said.

Scott Spaine, an agent for Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Co., opened his office in the center a little more than a year ago. "When you own a business, it's nice to keep costs as low as possible," he said.

Being surrounded by other companies definitely has helped Spaine's business. "It's ideal because I make a lot of contacts on a personal and business level," he said.

Because of the diversity of the businesses, they can feed off each other, Spaine added. He said the companies try to do business within the complex before they go to outside sources.

Restoration Woodworks, Inc., a business which specializes in the preservation and restoration of historic homes, has been operating in the center for almost a year and a half.

Co-owner Stephen Stiebel said he and his partner chose to locate in the center for several reasons. He said the location is good for the type of work he does because it provides easy access to Durham, Chapel Hill and Hillsborough.

"This was the best bargain we found for our shop at a price we could afford," he said.

Gold said his center in Hillsborough is not a unique concept. Business centers have been operating

in New England since the 1940s, when the North's textile industry died. "The Northeast then had a tremendous growth in old mills in the '50s and '60s, and sophisticated industries took over," he said.

This idea soon spread to the South when the textile industry here began to suffer, he added. There were many textile mills standing empty in North and South Carolina which were taken over by small industries to serve as distribution centers and office space.

But Gold does not see operations like the Hillsborough Business Center to be a trend of the future.

He said the textile industry is fairly healthy, and most of the old buildings already are occupied. "Most of the textile people going to go under have already gone under," he said.

Future development of office space and buildings will be along the interstates and near the airports, Gold said.

Lab Theatre's latest — the tale of a diabolical British barber

By ALSTON RUSSELL
Staff Writer

The Lab Theatre will make an ambitious attempt with its production of "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street." The play will be performed Sunday through Tuesday.

The play is based upon the legend of Sweeney Todd, an English barber who killed his customers and sent them to his neighbor, Mrs. Lovett, as ingredients for meat pies. Sweeney Todd represents the British idea of a "boogeyman."

"Sweeney Todd" is set in London of the 1850s. Although the author, C.G. Bond, wrote the play in 1973, he employed the traditional melodramatic writing style. Bobby Wallace, director of the Lab Theatre produc-

tion, said the melodrama makes the play special because the audience is able to see with a "heightened sense of reality." "Everything that happens in the play is pretty much life or death," he said.

According to Wallace, this production of "Sweeney Todd" is unique because it incorporates the concept of revenge into the play's action.

"In this version, he (Todd) is taking revenge upon a society that has done him wrong," Wallace said. Wallace said he chose this production of "Sweeney" because it could be seen as a "semblance of modern society."

Wallace said his production shows the people in charge as being the most corrupt. The production also shows how their vice affects the lesser

people. "It's about the powerlessness of one person against society — any society where there's a hierarchy," he said.

Sophomore Kelly Johnston plays Sweeney in the production. He said his character is different because he is basically obsessed with the one thought of revenge. "It's the kind of drive that's superhuman," he said. "Things may slow him down, but nothing can stop him."

Johnston said he works to give depth to Sweeney's character by showing moments in which he is human, so that the drama is not based

solely on revenge.

"Sweeney's the type of character that if you crossed him and it's not justifiable, then he'll never forgive it, and in the long run he'll get you back," Johnston said.

Sophomore Fabiana Politi plays Sweeney's neighbor, Mrs. Lovett. According to Politi, her character gives a lighter side to the play. "She's the comic relief in the play," she said. "She adds a bit of humor to the air."

Politi said she uses her own energy to incorporate her personality into the character of Mrs. Lovett. "I have a lot of energy, and the way I do

it, Mrs. Lovett has lots of energy, too," Politi said.

Freshman Todd DeVries plays the role of Anthony Hope, an optimistic, naive character who adds romance to the production. DeVries said his character was unique because of his blissful disposition.

"He's really romantic, and he googles his eyes," DeVries said. "He comes in with that attitude in life that's really youthful." DeVries said his own personality is similar to Hope's character because he is a "hopeless romantic."

The production consists of a large

cast, all undergraduates, many of whom have performed for the Lab Theatre before "Sweeney." Wallace said the music for this production is based on the famous musical version by Steven Sondheim. The cast has been preparing for this production for about five weeks, according to Wallace.

"Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" will be performed by the Lab Theatre Sunday and Monday at 4 and 8 p.m. and Tuesday at 5 p.m. in the basement of Graham Memorial Hall.

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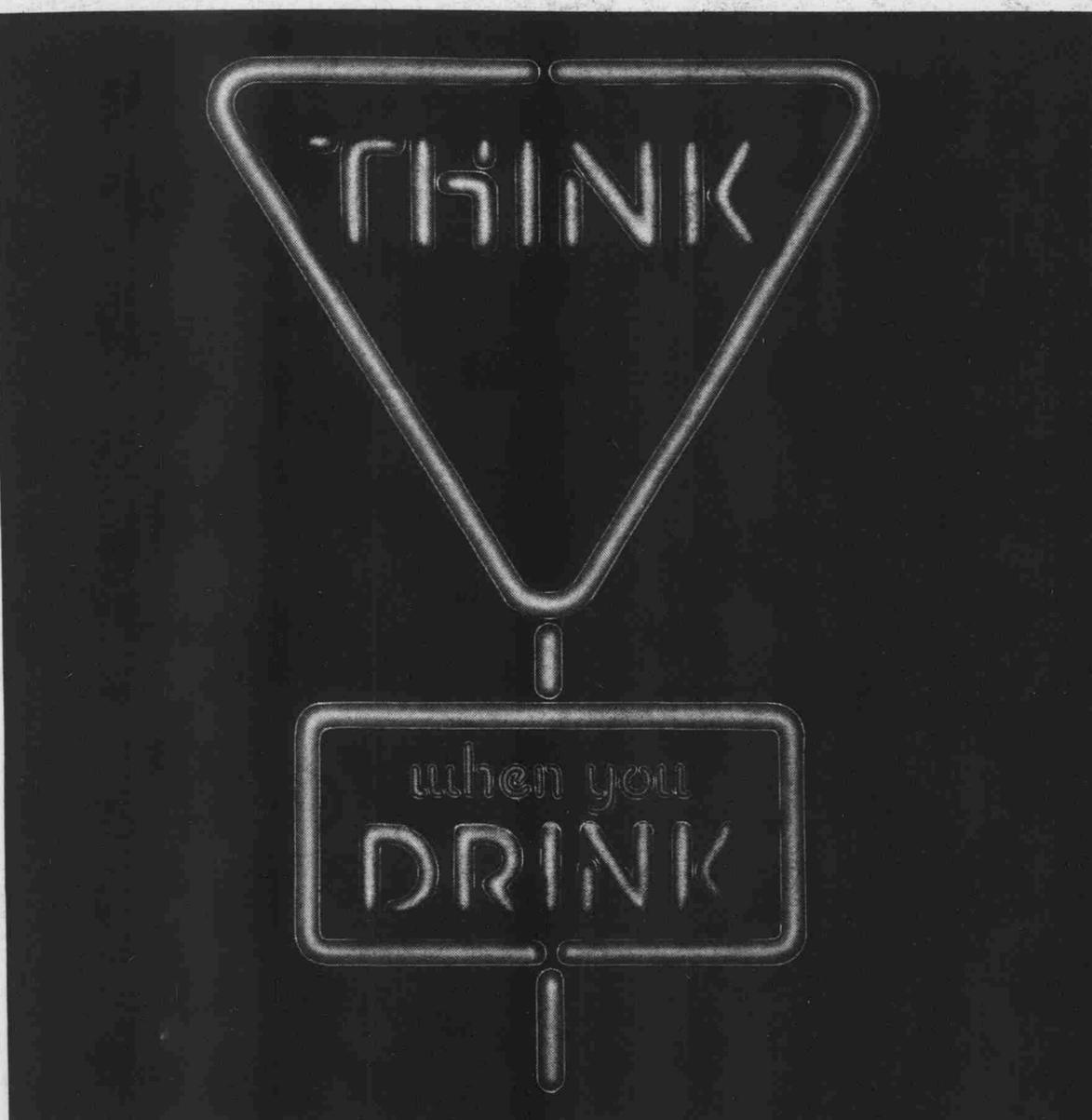
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