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Local Business Leaders Call for Permanent Removal of Silent Sam

“I work real hard to make sure everyone in this town has a really cool place to come to, eat good food, relax, and enjoy themselves” said Chris Carini, the owner and chef of Linda’s Bar and Grill. “I really don’t want to see something that could easily be changed turned into a source of violence and contempt.”

For decades, Linda’s has sat on Franklin Street, across from UNC’s McCorkle Place. Sitting in a booth and gazing out of their front window, you can see the pedestal on which Silent Sam once stood. This pedestal held the statue honoring Confederate soldiers from UNC for over 100 years. This changed on August 20, when protesters toppled the monument that was deemed by many to be a symbol of white supremacy. What followed was a series of protests involving those who wanted Sam to be gone for good, and those who wanted it to come back.

“To be completely honest, I was just praying that nothing bad would happen,” Carini said. “I was worried a nine-millimeter was gonna come slinging through the window right between my eyes.”

Linda’s, being just across the street from the statue, wasn’t immune to the effects of the protests. Not only did they scare Carini for his and other’s safety, but they affected his business too.

Carini said, "It has impacted our business. I wouldn't say severely but it is definitely something we have felt."

His complaints, along with other businesses in the area were heard. On August 30, The Chapel Hill/Carrboro Chamber of Commerce and the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership released an open letter to UNC Chancellor Carol Folt, calling for the permanent removal of the statue.

"It was bad for business," said Elinor Landess, executive director of the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership. "The Downtown Partnership has a responsibility to support businesses downtown, but also to create a welcoming environment for all."

Landess helped write the letter. The letter addressed three main reason for why the statue should be relocated.

The first was safety. These local organizations fear that more protests will cause physical harm to the members of the Chapel Hill Community.

Landess said, "By putting the statue back, we would just be opening up the door to more violence, and more vitriol, and more tension."

The second reason was business impact. The letter estimated a loss of \$189,000 in retail sales due to the protests.

The third was community reputation. The Downtown Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce fear that deadly incidents such as the 2017 protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, could happen here in Chapel Hill. Their letter states, "We are one dangerous protest away from destroying our community's reputation and becoming known more for this controversy than all our exceptional attributes."

Linda's owner Chris Carini was on board with the letter.

"No one's going to protest, or start spraying mace, or get into fights, or get arrested if it's not there," Carini said.

The final home for the statue has not yet been announced, and Chancellor Folt did not reply directly to the letter. But for now, when you look out the window from a barstool at Linda's, you will see Franklin Street, the green grass and tall trees on campus, and an empty pedestal of what once was.