

Night Scene: Club Zanzibar registers with resort patrons

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By **KITT WALSH**, Special to the Daily News

Whether you're old enough to remember John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever" or young enough to know how to download MP3s, as long as you like music, then Club Zanzibar is the place for you. The club's location in The Registry Resort makes it likely you will see fugitives from South Beach and trendy Europeans dancing next to somebody you just saw at the Chamber of Commerce meeting. And everyone will be having a great time.

"We have people from all over the world and still remain the favorite dancing club with the locals," says Registry Beverage Manager Ed McDermott. "Business really starts kicking around 11 p.m. with a crowd of people enjoying themselves."

Owned by local businessman H. Wayne Huizenga of Boca Resorts Inc., The Registry is one of a pantheon of his exclusive properties. Free stays at his other resorts are often offered as prizes at Zanzibar's special events —like the upcoming Halloween costume party where the top prize is \$500. Such special events help keep Club Zanzibar at the top of many people's social calendar.



DJ Art Rooney oversees the new sound system and computerized light boards at Club Zanzibar at The Registry Resort.

One of the things that differentiates Zanzibar from other clubs is the dress code.

"We do attract an upscale crowd, and our dress code helps keep it that way," explains McDermott.

Club Zanzibar's policy prohibits T-shirts, workboots and hats for men, though some of the same items are on sale just inside the door. These sport the club's name and are suggested for "wearing at the beach."

Club Zanzibar also has a \$5 cover to get into the club Friday and Saturday nights. Judging by the line outside on most weekends, the cover doesn't seem to discourage any revelers. The only party animals who are discouraged are those under 21.

"We are very strict about checking IDs at the door," warns McDermott.

But once you are in, prepare yourself for a sensory experience. The three-level bar has undergone a recent \$35,000 face lift, with most of the money spent on enhancements to the sound system and replacing the laser lights with new computerized Robo-Scan lights that create patterns to the music. For you boomers, fret not. The disco ball is still alive and well as is the mist machine (replacing the oily fog used at other clubs.) Upstairs is a special VIP room reserved for private parties and heavy hitters.

Regular drink prices are reasonable for a hotel bar. Wells are \$4, premiums are \$4.75, domestic beer is \$3.50, imported beer is \$4 and a glass of house wine will only set you back \$5. Or you can skip the line at the bar and pay a visit to the beer tub, where ice-cold bottles are \$4. Ladies night is every Thursday from 9 p.m.-2 a.m. when women drink wells, beer and wine all night for only \$1 per.

Club Zanzibar is only open at present on Thursday, Friday and Saturday (look for a live reggae night to be added on Wednesdays during season.) The nights are hosted by DJ Art Rooney.

Rooney, a native of New Jersey, got into the business after a tiff with a friend.

"He had been working as a DJ and I wanted to get out of the stock-brokerage business I had been in," says Rooney. "I asked him if we could become partners and share the cost of the equipment and music and everything. When he turned me down, I went into business for myself."

Rooney's first job was at a teen nightclub in a roller rink in Bricktown, N.J., where he made a new best friend, George Anton, who actually agreed to teach Rooney what he knew about spinning the hits. That education got Rooney gigs at some of the most famous places on the Jersey Shore, like Club XS, Club Hollywood and Panache.

Six years ago, however, a friend invited him down to DJ in his club, Norma Jean's in Fort Myers, but by the time Rooney got to Southwest Florida, that club was gone. An ad in the paper led him to a job at Pyramids and then he sent a resume to Club Oasis in Naples.

"I had gone to school with the owner's daughter in New Jersey," says Rooney. "She saw my resume on her father's desk, figured out it was me, and I got the job."

P.M. PATROL

Club Zanzibar, located in The Registry Resort, 475 Seagate Drive

Hours: Open Thursday-Saturday from 9 p.m.- 2 a.m. Cover charge on Friday and Saturday nights is \$5.

Details: There is an enforced dress code. Age 21 and older only. All major credit cards accepted. Lower level is handicapped accessible.

Information: (941) 597-3232.

When that club closed, Rooney moved on to Club 41 and then back up to Orbit Nightclub in Fort Myers before settling at Zanzibar a year ago.

"The crowd here is very receptive to new music," he says.

New music is Rooney's passion. He helps write dance charts for several trade publications, creates dance format shows for radio stations nationally and locally and owns his own production company, Aural Stimulation Productions, which creates radio commercials and imaging liners (those station IDs with effects like echoes and reverbs.)

"I absolutely love my job," says Rooney. "Club Zanzibar is a great place to work and a great place to play."
