



# Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: November 14, 2022

## THE CONDOR

*Application No.:* LBR-2019-20-036  
*Business Name:* The Condor  
*Business Address:* 560 Broadway  
*District:* District 3  
*Applicant:* Philip F. Lesser, Owner's Authorized Agent  
*Nomination Letter Date:* June 8, 2020  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

### BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

The Condor is an adult entertainment venue located at 560 Broadway in the North Beach neighborhood. Established by Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli in 1958, the business was a trailblazing promoter of topless dancing in the 1960s and has remained a fixture of the city's nightlife to this day.

Originally a neighborhood tavern, The Condor underwent a major renovation in 1961, when it expanded into the adjacent storefront and erected an elevated stage for performances. The business quickly became a popular venue for live music and dance; its nightly entertainment culminated with performances by Carol Doda, who descended from the ceiling on a hydraulic baby grand piano. In 1964, Doda made international headlines when she performed topless at The Condor, helping to launch an era of topless entertainment that swept across North Beach and the nation. The following year, when the San Francisco Police Department arrested Doda and other performers on indecency charges, Del Prete and Mattioli formed the Broadway Businessman's Association to coordinate a defense in court. The Condor's landmark legal victory established that topless dancing did not violate obscenity laws, set important case precedent related to censorship, and cemented San Francisco's reputation as a city that celebrates freedom of expression.

Now owned by Joseph Carouba of SAW Entertainment, The Condor continues to honor its pioneering legacy in the entertainment industry. The business features nightly topless dancing, hosts comedy shows and blues performances, and offers a full bar, bistro menu, and TV screens that broadcast live sports. The Condor is a popular choice for birthday, bachelor, and bachelorette parties, and draws a mix of tourists, conventioners, office workers, and curiosity seekers. The business is also active in the North Beach community; Carouba founded the Top of Broadway Community Benefit District to help improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.

### CRITERION 1

**Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?**

Yes, The Condor has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

560 Broadway from 1958 to Present (64 Years)

#### Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





## CRITERION 2

**Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?**

Yes, The Condor has contributed to the history and identity of the North Beach neighborhood and San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The Condor is significant for its association with San Francisco entertainment history and the proliferation of topless dancing in the United States. In 1965, San Francisco Police Department officers and agents of the California Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control raided The Condor, arresting performer Carol Doda for indecent exposure and owners Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli for running a disorderly house. All three were acquitted in May of 1965 in a court case that established that topless dancing in North Beach clubs did not violate obscenity laws. The case had important ramifications for censorship, freedom of expression, and entertainment in the United States.
- The Condor is also closely associated with Carol Doda, who worked at the club for several decades. Her topless performances generated international headlines, quickly propelling her to stardom as one of the nation's first adult entertainment celebrities. Doda remained a San Francisco icon until her death in 2015.
- Although 560 Broadway Street is not currently listed on a historic resource registry, it was evaluated during the 1984 North Beach Survey and determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The business is located within the boundaries of the community sponsored North Beach Survey, which is currently underway.
- There have been numerous articles on The Condor and profiles of Carol Doda published in the San Francisco Chronicle over the years. The 1965 court case, dubbed the "The People versus The Condor," received widespread coverage in the press and a feature on KRON-TV news.

## CRITERION 3

**Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?**

Yes, The Condor is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that The Condor qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior features of 560 Broadway including:
  - Brick façade.
  - Historical plaque commemorating first topless and bottomless performances at The Condor.
  - Neon "Condor Topless A-Go-Go" marquee.
- Interior features including:
  - Remnant of blinking nipples neon sign.
  - Wall-mounted piano on which Carol Doda performed.

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- Business services and programming including:
  - Daily live topless entertainment.
  - VIP room service.
  - Live adult comedy shows.
  - Screening of sporting events.
- Elevated stage for performances.
- Mirror display behind stage.
- Red leather booths.

### **CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS**

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Bar.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include The Condor currently located at 560 Broadway in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

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# Small Business Commission

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_

November 14, 2022

## THE CONDOR

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**Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for The Condor, currently located at 560 Broadway.**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on November 14, 2022, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes The Condor in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

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**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at The Condor.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior features of 560 Broadway including:
  - Brick façade.
  - Historical plaque commemorating first topless and bottomless performances at The Condor.
  - Neon “Condor Topless A-Go-Go” marquee.
- Interior features including:
  - Remnant of blinking nipples neon sign.
  - Wall-mounted piano on which Carol Doda performed.
- Business services and programming including:
  - Daily live topless entertainment.
  - VIP room service.
  - Live adult comedy shows.
  - Screening of sporting events.
- Elevated stage for performances.
- Mirror display behind stage.
- Red leather booths.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain The Condor on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Bar.

---

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on November 14, 2022.

---

Katy Tang  
Director

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Ayes –  
Nays –  
Abstained –  
Absent –

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# Legacy Business Registry

# Application Review Sheet

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*Nomination Letter Date:* June 8, 2020  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin

**CRITERION 1:** Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?  
☒ Yes ☐ No

560 Broadway from 1958 to Present (64 Years)

**CRITERION 2:** Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?  
☒ Yes ☐ No

**CRITERION 3:** Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?  
☒ Yes ☐ No

**NOTES:** n/a

**DELIVERY DATE TO HPC:** September 21, 2022

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

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Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

AARON PESKIN

October 19, 2022

Director Katy Tang *via email* <Katy.Tang@sfgov.org>  
San Francisco Office of Small Business  
City Hall, Room 110  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Director Tang,

I am writing to nominate the Condor Club for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Situated at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Broadway at the foot of North Beach, the Condor Club and its iconic neon sign have lit up the neighborhood long before Carol Doda took the stage as the first public topless dancer in 1964. For most of the 20th Century, including its days as Pucci's House of Pisco, The Condor served as a gateway of sorts between San Francisco's Financial District and the nightlife of North Beach. Ms. Doda and the Condor Club were fundamental to San Francisco's iconic reputation in the mid- to late-1960s, and Ms. Doda remained a world-famous fixture around North Beach until her passing in 2015.

The Condor Club's legacy is well suited for the Legacy Business Registry, and I look forward to its inclusion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aaron Peskin".

Aaron Peskin

## Section One:

### Business / Applicant Information.

Please provide the following information:

- The name, mailing address and other contact information of the business;
- The name of the person who owns the business. For businesses with multiple owners, identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business;
- The name, title and contact information of the applicant;
- The business's San Francisco Business Account Number and entity number with the Secretary of State, if applicable.

<b>NAME OF BUSINESS:</b>	
The Condor	
<b>BUSINESS OWNER(S)</b> (Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business):	
S.A.W. Entertainment, Limited (Joseph Carouba)	
<b>CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:</b>	<b>TELEPHONE NUMBER:</b>
560 Broadway, San Francisco CA 94133	(415) 781-8222
	<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>
	Marketing@CondorSF.com
<b>MAILING ADDRESS – STREET ADDRESS:</b>	<b>MAILING ADDRESS – CITY AND STATE:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Same as Business Address	250 Columbus Ave, Suite 207, San Francisco CA
	<b>MAILING ADDRESS – ZIP CODE:</b>
	94133
<b>WEBSITE ADDRESS:</b>	
CondorSF.com	
<b>FACEBOOK PAGE:</b>	
Facebook.com/CondorSF.com	
<b>TWITTER NAME:</b>	
CondorSF	
<b>APPLICANT'S NAME:</b>	<b>APPLICANT'S TELEPHONE NUMBER:</b>
Philip F. Lesser	
<b>APPLICANT'S TITLE:</b>	<b>APPLICANT'S EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>
Owner's Authorized Agent	
<b>SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:</b>	
01472704	
<b>SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (If applicable):</b>	
C1122049	



## Section Two:

### Business Location(s).

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business. If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address. For businesses with more than one location, list the additional locations in section three of the narrative.

ORIGINAL SAN FRANCISCO ADDRESS	ZIP CODE	START DATE OF BUSINESS
560 Broadway San Francisco California	94133	June 1958
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATION	
yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	1958 through Present	

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
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OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

## Section Three:

### Disclosure Statement.

#### San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- ☒ I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- ☒ I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- ☒ I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- ☒ I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- ☒ I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- ☒ I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- ☒ I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

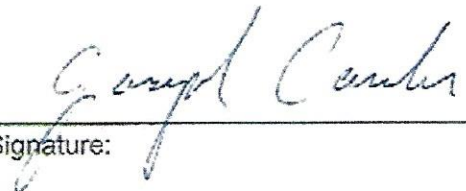
Joseph Carouba

August 25, 2022

Name (Print):

Date:

Signature:



# **THE CONDOR**

## **Written Historical Narrative**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?**

The Condor, located at 560 Broadway in the North Beach neighborhood, promotes itself as the “sexiest full bar and restaurant” in San Francisco. It provides topless entertainment, comedy, and live music along with a well-stocked bar and food menu in a venue celebrating its historic contributions to San Francisco entertainment history.

#### **b. Describe who the business serves.**

The Condor serves a broad range of adults from people throughout the Bay Area to tourists visiting San Francisco from around the world.

Depending on the day of week and time of day, different communities patronize The Condor. In the afternoons, it’s much like a neighborhood tavern, with a sports game on the screen and a bartender who knows what you drink. Saturday afternoons feature live blues performances. Lots of tourists stop in to rest and reorient, as the Broadway and Columbus intersection is often a recommended site in San Francisco travelogues.

The topless entertainment begins in the evening, usually attracting an after-work crowd leaving the financial district. As the evening wears on, there are more conventioners, visiting businessmen, curiosity seekers, couples out on a titillating date, and small groups of women and/or men celebrating a birthday or engagement. The Condor also seeks to be a “bachelor/bachelorette party headquarters.”

#### **c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.**

San Francisco’s original gentlemen’s strip club.

### **CRITERION 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years**

#### **a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.**

The business was established in March 1958 when Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli entered into a 50-50 partner ownership of the “Black Condor,” a bar with a jukebox with occupancy of 54 people located at 560 Broadway.



In June 1958, they renamed the bar "The Condor."

In 1961, The Condor underwent an expansion, merging with the adjacent Columbus Avenue commercial space vacated by an Italian ceramics retailer. An elevated stage was erected for musicians, go-go dancers, and other entertainers.

In 1962, Gino and Pete hired Davey (David?) "Big Davey" Rosenberg as a talent scout and public relations officer. Big Davey hired singers George Hamilton and Teddy Brown to join the Jokers Three. They become the house band and one of the "hottest acts in town." (In 1963 George, Teddy and the Jokers Three record a live album: "The Condor!")

In January 1963, Carol Doda was hired as a cocktail waitress and encouraged by Big Davey to piano dance. She got billed as "Twisting Carol, the girl on the piano." Shortly thereafter, Big Davey conceived of a piano descending down a pole from a concealed opening in the ceiling with Carol on it at the beginning of her act then ascending with her on the piano at the end of her act.

On June 19, 1964, Carol Doda made international news by performing topless at The Condor.

Carol Doda got silicone breast enhancement treatment, going from a 36B to a 44DD. As a publicity stunt, Big Davey had Carol's enlarged breasts insured by Lloyd's of London for \$1.5 million. At the height of her fame, Carol's breasts were dubbed "the New Twin Peaks of San Francisco."

On April 22, 1965, 32 SFPD officers and agents of the ABC raided The Condor and other San Francisco topless clubs. Carol was arrested for indecent exposure. Gene and Pete were arrested for running a disorderly house.

Pete became a founder of the Broadway Businessman's Association to protect artistic expression.

On May 7, 1965, Carol, Gene, and Pete were acquitted in "The People versus The Condor." The jury finding was that there was no "salacious intent;" therefore, exposing breasts was not lewd or obscene.

In 1966, Tony Cannistraci, a bartender at The Condor, was given a 10% interest in the business, with Gino and Pete each keeping a 45% interest.

On September 3, 1969, after working at several other entertainment venues, Carol Doda returned to The Condor and danced completely nude.

In 1972, Jerry Morris and Don Levine bought Gino's 45% interest in the business.

Then in the spring of 1974, Don Levine bought the remaining 55% interest from Pete and Tony.

Between 1974 and 1980, Don Levine assumed full ownership of the club, then sold The Condor to Don Benson.

After closing hours on November 23, 1983, The Condor made international news again with the infamous “Piano Death” of Jimmy “The Beard” Ferrozzi, the club bouncer who was crushed to death when the piano inadvertently ascended back to the ceiling while he and a club dancer were having sex. Jimmy and his girlfriend, exotic dancer Theresa Hill, decided after hours to have sexual intercourse on the famous white piano Carol Doda made her entrance on, being lowered from the ceiling by cables. They accidentally hit the on switch, and the piano rapidly rose to the ceiling, crushing Jimmy. Theresa survived only because she was thinner than her companion.

In 1990, Don Benson sold The Condor to S.A.W. Entertainment, Ltd.

In August 1991, S.A.W. Entertainment, Ltd. removed The Condor marquee with Carol Doda’s cartoon depiction replete with red-light blinking nipples. It was replaced with a neon sign bearing “Condor Topless A-Go-Go.”

In 2000, The Condor business model morphed into a Gentlemen’s Club with sports bar and bistro.

In 2022, S.A.W. Entertainment, Ltd. applied to have “The Condor” placed in San Francisco’s Legacy Business Registry in recognition of its being a longstanding, community-serving business that has been a valuable cultural asset to San Francisco for a half century.

**b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.**

1958 to 1966:	Gino Del Prete (50%) and Pete Mattioli (50%)
1966 to 1972:	Gino Del Prete (45%), Pete Mattioli (45%) and Tony Cannistraci (10%)
1972 to 1974:	Pete Mattioli (45%), Don Levine (22.5%), Jerry Morris (22.5%), and Tony Cannistraci (10%)
1974 to 1974:	Don Levine (77.5%) and Jerry Morris (22.5%)
1974 to 1980:	Don Levine (100%)
1980 to 1990:	Don Benson (100%)
1990 to Present:	S.A.W. Entertainment, Limited (100%)

**c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.**

Because of the restrictions and complexities of operating during the COVID pandemic, The Condor closed from March 13, 2020, to May 21, 2021.

## **CRITERION 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community**

### **a. Describe the business' contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community, business sector, or San Francisco as a whole.**

The Condor pioneered the on- and off-Broadway striptease clubs. This has been a tremendous boon for San Francisco's tourism as well as general economy.

The history of The Condor is inextricably linked to its mega star Carol Doda. Her performances at The Condor and her visage on the original marquee have acted as major attractants to seekers of nightlife entertainment patronizing North Beach and Broadway in particular.

In 1965, the court ruling in favor of The Condor established that topless dancing in North Beach clubs did not violate U.S. obscenity laws. This was a major case in relation to censorship and freedom of expression under the Constitution.

### **b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?**

Following are significant or historical people associated with the business, including notable dates and events:

- 1963: The biracial house band, George, Teddy and the Jokers recorded live "The Condor!"
- June 19, 1964: Carol Doda performed topless.
- April 22, 1965: Arrests of Carol Doda (indecent exposure) and Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli (operating a disorderly house). Carol, Gino and Pete were acquitted on all charges on May 7, 1965.
- September 3, 1969: Carol Doda performed completely nude.
- November 23, 1983: "Piano death" of bouncer Jimmy "The Beard" Ferrozio

### **c. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?**

In 1965 after the mass arrests of topless club owners and employees, Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli formed the Broadway Businessman's Association. This association worked collaboratively to prevail in defending "artistic expression" and in so doing keeping North Beach's topless clubs open.

In 1991, the "legs" section of the original blinking Condor sign was auctioned off at an AIDS Benefit.

Between 2012 and 2020, S.A.W. Entertainment, Ltd. majority owner Joseph Carouba formed and operated the Top of Broadway Community Benefit District to improve the quality of life in The Condor's immediate environs.

**d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?**

The Condor has received a considerable amount of press locally, nationally, and abroad given the path-breaking and colorful events that occurred within its walls.

In “Famed stripper ‘turned the world,” by writers Kevin Fagan and Sam Whiting, San Francisco Chronicle, November 12, 2015, contained these especially poignant quotes:

- “San Francisco history is made up of characters, and Carol certainly was one of those,” said Charlotte Shultz, chief of protocol for San Francisco. “She changed Broadway and made news around the world. People said, ‘Only in San Francisco,’ and we didn’t mind people saying that.”
- “Carol Doda was a part of that early scene that transformed North Beach into what one would expect to see in New Orleans or in some of the areas in Paris,” said former Mayor Willie Brown. “She was bright, able, beautiful, creative and outrageous.” So outrageous that Herb Caen “made her one of his weekly figures, and that was an honor,” said Brown.”

On the same day (November 12, 2015), examples of Herb Caen’s coverage of Carol Doda over her career appeared in a San Francisco Chronicle article entitled “Legendary stripper a fixture in – San Francisco Chronicle.” Among those “three-dot” gems:

- Carol Doda quit the Condor last month but her name is still up in lights so she has commanded her lawyer Haig Harris Jr., to file suit against Condor owner David Benson. ‘It’s not fair to the tourists,’ pouts Carol. “They want the real things.” January 1, 1986
- Allen White recalls the night he and Liberace wandered into the Condor on Bawdway, where Carol Doda descended topless on a grand piano strung from cables. Afterward, Lib said to her: “What a coincidence – we both use Baldwins!” February 9, 1987

Another retrospective article: “In memory of our lost landmarks,” by Peter Hartlaub, San Francisco Chronicle, July 2, 2022, included the original Condor sign in the same grouping with the Hamm’s Brewery, Mr. Peanut, and Doggie Diner head signs that are etched deeply in many living memories. The article began:

- “Never forget: Carol Doda was a pioneer and San Francisco icon who became one of the first adult entertainment celebrities ... The sign was so famous that the Condor offered it to the Smithsonian when it finally came down in 1991.”

**e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?**

A California historical plaque graces the front façade of the Condor with the following inscription:

# THE CONDOR

## WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

### THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE WORLD'S FIRST TOPLESS & BOTTOMLESS ENTERTAINMENT

TOPLESS – JUNE 19, 1964  
BOTTOMLESS – SEPTEMBER 3, 1969  
STARING MS. CAROL DODA

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

**f. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?**

If you pull a string from The Condor, you'd end up at the Barbary Coast. The clubs on Broadway are one of the last vestiges of that bygone era. The Condor was the beginning of topless entertainment in the country. It was the transition point from burlesque to the clubs of today. The Condor and the topless entertainment craze was a harbinger of the free love movement of the 1960s. Losing the Condor, which embodies San Francisco's cultural history of daring to be different and tolerant, would be like losing a piece of the city's soul.

**CRITERION 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business**

**a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?**

The Condor building is definitely culturally significant. The exterior elements of the building include the brick façade, the historical plaque, and most importantly the imposing neon "Condor Topless A-Go-Go" marquee. Interior homages to its past include the upper half of the blinking nipples sign that bore Carol Doda's name and the piano upon which she performed.

**b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.**

The Condor will continue to provide top-class daily live topless entertainment coupled with a well-stocked sports bar. The business will also continue to include VIP room service as well as screening of special big-screen sporting events and live adult comedy reviews.

**c. What challenges is the business facing today?**

Three years into the COVID pandemic, the following challenges are extremely taxing The Condor:

- The absence of business travelers.
- The high percentage of San Francisco workers who are working remotely.
- Supply chain issues with distributors.
- Difficulties filling open positions for bar, wait, hosts, and DJ staff.
- Employees contracting COVID and missing multiple shifts.
- Violent crime targeting people with expensive clothes, watches, and jewelry
- Inflation reducing purchases by patrons when at The Condor.
- Inflation reducing the number of patrons going to The Condor.

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**Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:**

**a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.**

Bar featuring adult entertainment.

**b. Other special features of the business location, such as if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.**

The building at 560 Broadway has a Planning Dept. Historic Resource Status of “A – Historic Resource Present.” In 1984, the property was determined eligible for listing in the National Register or the California Register.





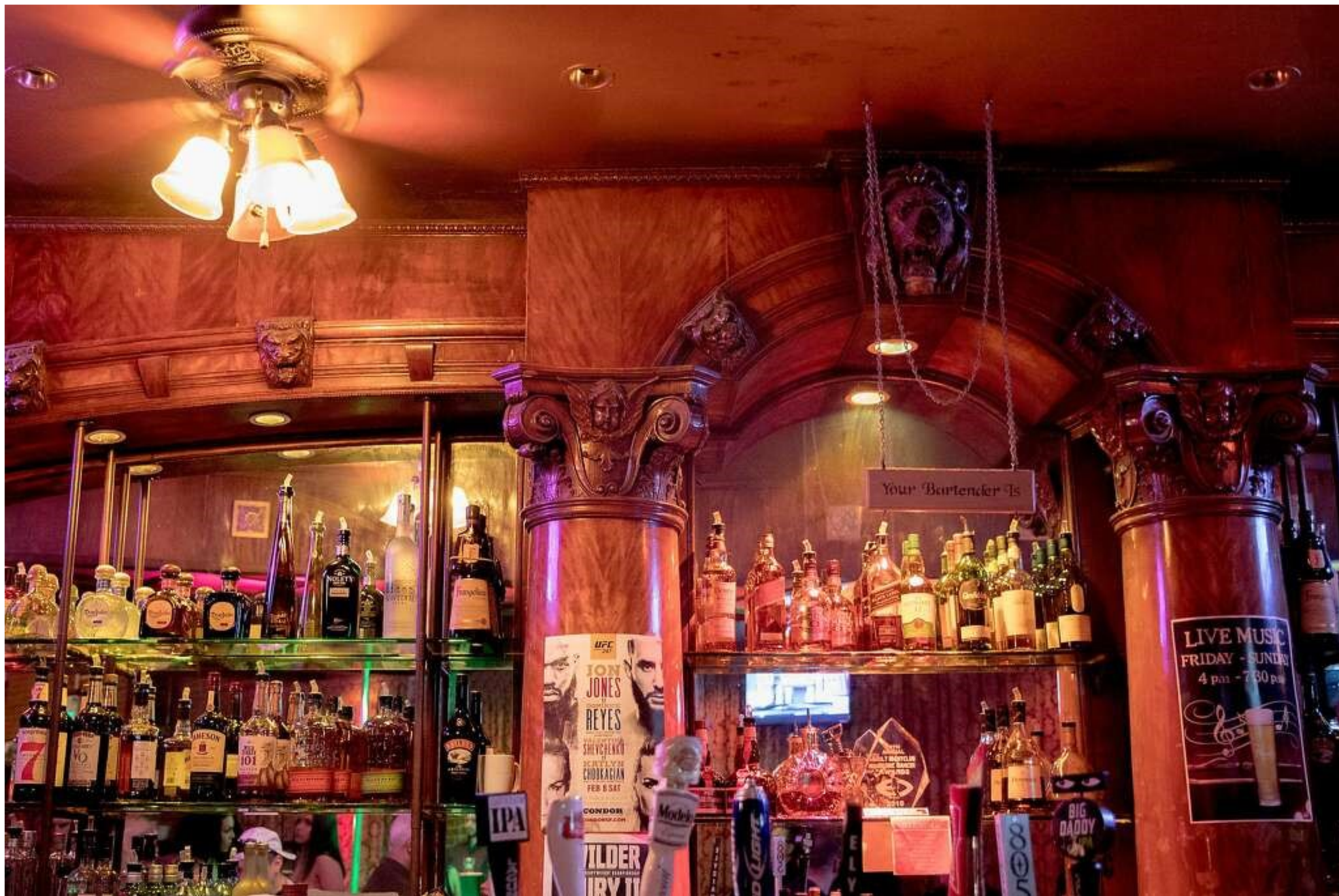




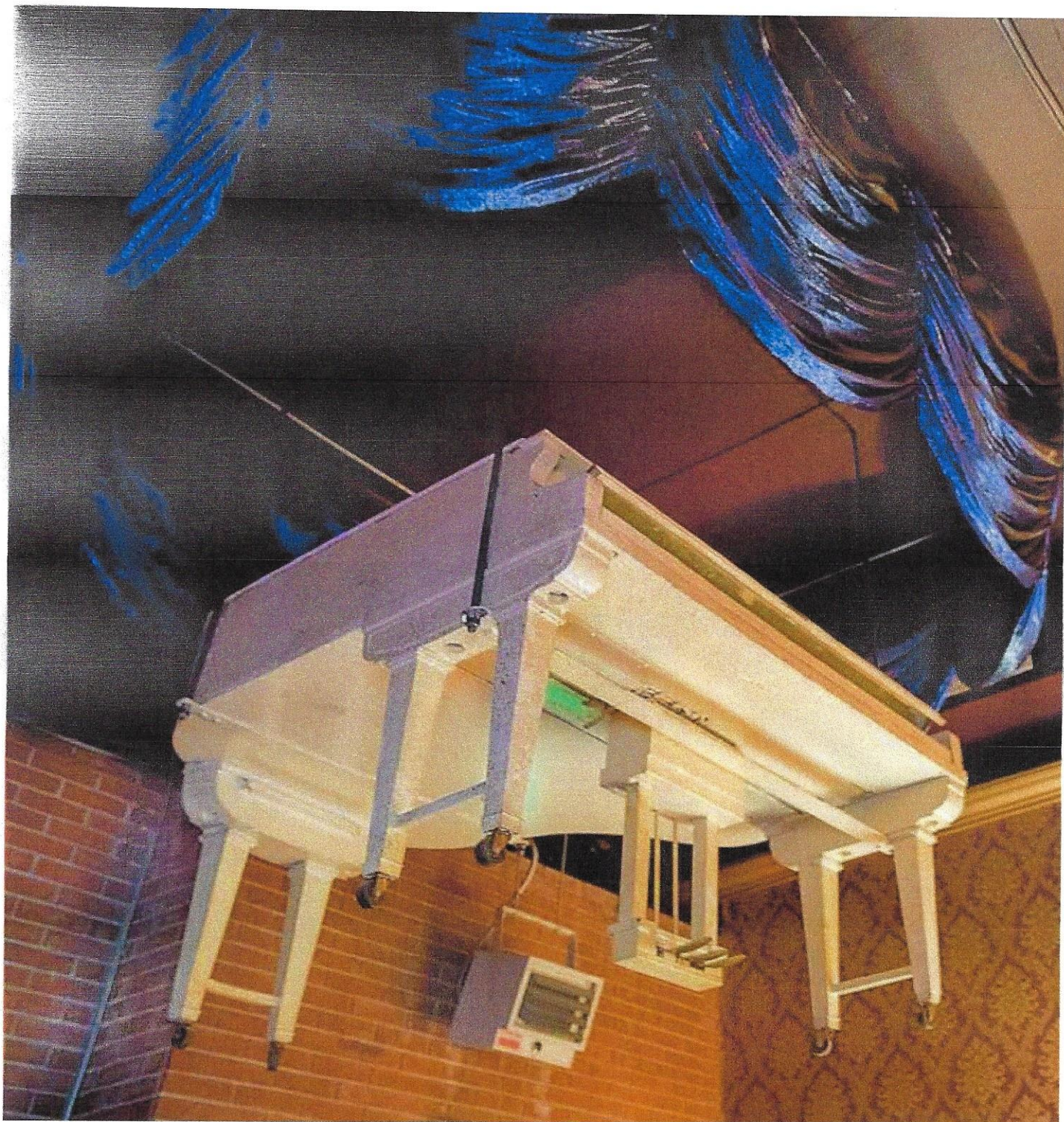












A large piano used in performances from the early days of the Condor Club in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Friday, February 7, 2020. Famed dancer Carol Doda would descend from the piano to begin the evening's show. In 1983, a man was killed on the famous white piano when it was accidentally turned on. | Jessica Christian / The Chronicle





The Condor Blinking Sign Circa 1970

# IN FACT

by: Louis R. Biro

NOVEMBER 23, 1983

AT FAMOUS SAN FRANCISCO  
TOPLESS NIGHTCLUB  
**THE CONDOR**



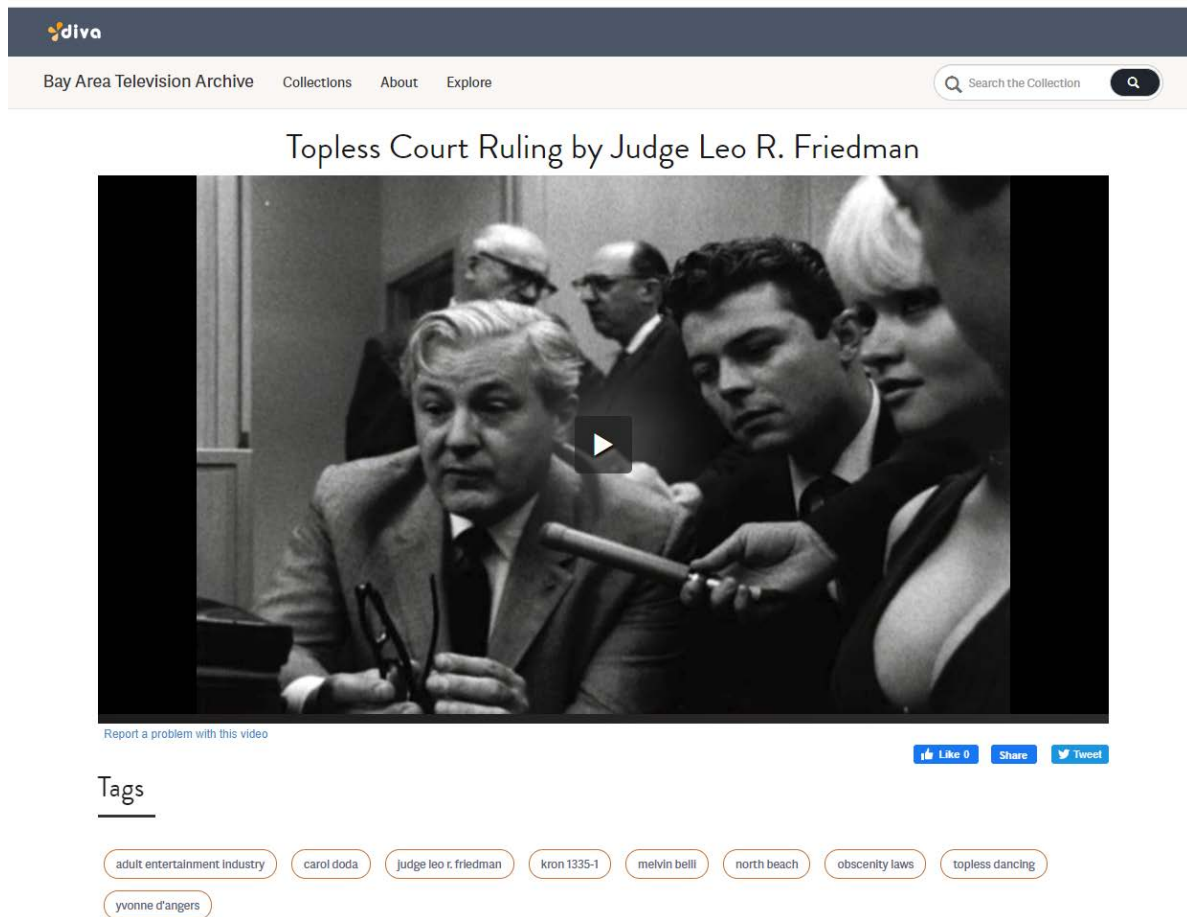
**ASSISTANT MANAGER  
"JIMMY THE BEARD" FERROZZO WAS FOUND CRUSHED  
TO DEATH BETWEEN THE CEILING AND A PROP  
ELEVATOR PIANO THAT ACCIDENTALLY ROSE WHILE  
HE WAS ENTANGLED ATOP IT WITH HIS NAKED  
GIRLFRIEND, WHO SURVIVED**



# Topless Court Ruling by Judge Leo R. Friedman

## Website:

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/237438>



## Description:

KRON-TV news footage from May 7th 1965 featuring scenes from the courtroom of Judge Leo R. Friedman in San Francisco, who has just ruled that topless dancing in North Beach clubs does not violate U.S. obscenity laws. Includes an interview with defense lawyer Melvin Belli who talks about the case in relation to censorship and also with Judge Friedman, who refers to freedom of expression under the Constitution. Ends with an interview with a man who also discusses this case and a brief word from topless dancer Carol Doda, who says she's going back to work. At the time of this court case, Doda had already been topless dancing in North Beach clubs for 11 months. Opening graphic designed by Carrie Hawks.

**Additional Information:**

Date	5/7/1965
Format	16mm b&w negative magnetic sound film
Digital Format	mp4 file
Genre	local newsfilm
Copyright Holder	Young Broadcasting of San Francisco, Inc.
Duration	6:47
Identifier	KRON 1335-1
Views	635

**Related Items:**

[San Francisco Topless Obscenity Case](#)

[Melvin Belli Supports Topless Dancing \(KRON-TV\)](#)

[Melvin Belli Supports Topless Dancing](#)

[Carol Doda and North Beach Topless Compilation Reel](#)

[Topless Court Hearing](#)

[Melvin Belli Criticizes Police Crackdown on Topless Clubs](#)

[Alcoholic Beverage Control Department Files Charges Against Off Broadway Club](#)

[North Beach Topless Bar Raids \(1965\)](#)

[Interview with Yvonne D'Angers](#)

[Carol Doda Protests Against North Beach Cover Up \(1973\)](#)

[Yvonne D'Angers denies claim of fraudulent marriage](#)

[Carol Doda Gets Plaster Casted](#)

[Bottomless Obscenity](#)

[Big Al's Topless Club](#)

[North Beach Hearing About Public Decency](#)

[Carol Doda interviewed on grand piano](#)

[People On The Street Talk About Topless Dancing \(1965\)](#)

[City Regulation Of Topless Dancing in North Beach](#)

News // Bay Area & State

## Legendary S.F. stripper Carol Doda dies at 78

Kevin Fagan, Sam Whiting

Nov. 11, 2015 | Updated: Nov. 11, 2015 10:43 p.m.



7 of 51



Legendary North Beach stripper Carol Doda works at her Champagne and Lace lingerie shop in San Francisco on Tuesday, July 14, 2009.

Paul Chinn/The Chronicle

[Click here to view article online and browse all 51 images](#)

Carol Doda, who helped take stripping out of the shadowy margins of American society and gained worldwide fame as a topless dancer in the 1960s and '70s, died Monday of complications related to kidney failure. She was 78.

Longtime friend Dick Winn said friends and family wanted to keep the news quiet for a couple of days so they could make funeral arrangements in peace.

"San Francisco history is made up of characters, and Carol certainly was one of those," said Charlotte Shultz, chief of protocol for San Francisco. "She changed Broadway and made news around the world. People said, 'Only in San Francisco,' and we didn't mind people saying that."

Ms. Doda was not the first stripper in San Francisco but she was probably the classiest, and she made her art form more acceptable to a mainstream audience. The city has always embraced the entertainer in any form, and Ms. Doda, with her combination of looks, personality and humor, was eagerly promoted as the city's peep-show ambassador.

"Carol Doda was a part of that early scene that transformed North Beach into what one would expect to see in New Orleans or in some of the areas in Paris," said former Mayor Willie Brown. "She was bright, able, beautiful, creative and outrageous." So outrageous that columnist Herb Caen "made her one of his weekly figures, and that was an honor," said Brown.

### **'Launched the topless craze'**

For many years, Ms. Doda was a major attraction for people who wanted a taste of the ribald side of town and who followed the oversized neon rendering of her, with flashing lights representing her nipples, into the Condor nightclub on Broadway.

"She was much more than just dancing," said Winn, who performed show tunes with her in her later years. "She was one of the fastest comedians I ever knew for coming back with wisecracks. She was a wonderfully caring person who listened to you and gave good advice."

In her Condor act, there would be a fanfare to build anticipation, then the spotlight would hit a white baby grand piano slowly descending from the ceiling. Atop that piano was the statuesque Ms. Doda, in her mono-kini, proudly displaying her 44-inch bust. She would dance and swivel her way through a few numbers before the piano ascended back to the ceiling, with Ms. Doda never leaving her perch.

"She launched the topless craze that swept San Francisco and the nation in the 1960s," said Ernie Beyl, a historian and author who recently published the book "Sketches from a North Beach Journal," with a chapter titled "Carol Doda and her Swimsuit." "It's invigorating to live in a city where one of the most prominent citizens was a topless dancer," he wrote.

"She was an important part of North Beach San Francisco," said longtime publicist Lee Houskeeper, who was an agent for rock acts including Jefferson Airplane in the 1960s. "She came at a time when the Beats were handing the torch to the hippies, and she turned the world upside-down."

Shultz recalled that during the Republican National Convention of 1964, which nominated Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater for president, that "the big request from delegates was for reservations to see Carol Doda at the Condor."

Ms. Doda grew up in San Francisco. Her parents divorced when she was 3, and she dropped out of school in the eighth grade.

"I thought the only way to make it was to be a cocktail waitress, so that's what I did when I was 14," she once said. "You can make yourself look older if you use your hair and makeup right."

She said she avoided doing drugs, drinking heavily or prostitution. "Underneath this blonde hair, I do think logically," she said. "I know how to survive."

Ms. Doda was already a waitress who go-go danced on top of a piano at the Condor 51 years ago when the club's publicist, Davey Rosenberg, handed her a Rudi Gernreich topless swimsuit — the first of its kind — and said, "Try this in the act."

It was a sensation — the first topless dancing act of widespread note in America. So many customers packed the club that Ms. Doda spent \$1,500 to boost her bust size from 34B to 44DD through silicone injection, which was then a new technique. It was painful, she said, but the results were very popular. Ms. Doda said she never suffered health complications.

At the height of her fame, Ms. Doda's breasts were dubbed "the New Twin Peaks of San Francisco." At one point they were insured for \$1.5 million with Lloyd's of London.

"The minute I knew I existed in life was the night I started the Condor thing," Ms. Doda said in a 2009 interview. "The only thing that mattered to me was entertaining people. That always drove me."  
Wide variety of jobs

Ms. Doda's only arrest in the profession came in 1965, when police raided the Condor on indecency charges. She was found not guilty and continued to dance until 1985, when she quit, saying she was never paid enough.

Along the way, there were stints in the 1970s as a spokesmodel for Channel 36 in San Jose — "the Perfect 36" — and an acting role in "Head," the 1968 film featuring the Monkees. She was also profiled in Tom Wolfe's 1968 book, "The Pump House Gang."

After leaving the Condor, she started a rock band, the Lucky Stiffs. When that faded in the 1990s, she started a lingerie shop in San Francisco called Champagne and Lace and did comedy, singing and dancing — with her clothes on — at North Beach nightclubs near where she once danced topless. She was sashaying through her flirtatious act, warbling "That Old Black Magic" and the like, until her health began to fail this year.

She often said she considered herself more of an entertainer than a stripper.

"As rough as she could look sometimes, she was into health food and was really such a sweet person," said Marsha Garland, ex-director of the North Beach Chamber of Commerce. "I have nothing but kind words for her."

### **Extended family**

Ms. Doda was so fervently protective of her privacy that few knew she had a large, extended family in Northern California, let alone had given birth while quite young to two children with whom she had little contact. The extended family gave her joy, and a chance to let down her hair outside of the city, relatives said.

"We were her second home, and not part of that San Francisco life," said cousin Dina Moore of Suisun City. "We are just a bunch of kooky Italians who love to eat, be with each other and celebrate life. I cannot remember a holiday when she wasn't around."

Moore said her cousin was so private “because a lot of celebrities are afraid of what people will do with the information.” Nobody else in the family became a stripper, she said, mostly working in banking, business or the government.

“She buffered and blocked certain things so much that even I didn’t know how old she was for many, many years,” Moore said with a chuckle. “She always just said she was 35 — and she could pull it off. “She was a lot of fun, a class act — not sleazy,” she added. “The show was always tongue in cheek, right up to the end. She’s like a hero to me, one of the strongest women I know. A survivor.”

Jeannette Etheredge, who owned the iconic Tosca Cafe from 1979 to 2013, said Ms. Doda was a fixture at the joint, seeking out the same spot every time for not just camaraderie, but a respite from the hubbub in busy North Beach.

“She sat on the very last barstool in the place, the same one, for more than 30 years, and she wanted to have her White Nun (a hot version of a white Russian drink) in peace,” Etheredge said. “She didn’t care for the cappuccino. She only liked the White Nun.”

Ms. Doda, who lived in San Francisco until the end, never envisioned an end to her show-biz career, even after branching out to the lingerie shop.

“The only way I’ll stop performing is when I can’t walk anymore, honey,” she told a reporter in 2009. Her neon sign may no longer beckon on Broadway, but it still flickers in the memories of the people who passed it — and its top half is on display for peeping inside the door of the club.

“Carol will always be remembered as another first in San Francisco,” said Schulz, “and that billboard will remind us of her and to keep on flashing.”

Ms. Doda, who had told The Chronicle she never married, is survived by her son, Tom Smith, and grandson, Westin T. Smith, both of Napa; and seven cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents and her daughter, Donna Smith Terzian.

A memorial is tentatively planned for Nov. 22 at the Tupelo club and restaurant on Grant Avenue.

*Kevin Fagan and Sam Whiting are San Francisco Chronicle staff writers. E-mail: [kfagan@sfgchronicle.com](mailto:kfagan@sfgchronicle.com), [swhiting@sfgchronicle.com](mailto:swhiting@sfgchronicle.com) Twitter: @KevinChron, @samwhitingsf*









L-R: Dave "Big Davey" Rosenberg, Gino Del Prete, Carol Doda and Herb Caen at the Condor on October 29, 1965



Legendary stripper a fixture in - San Francisco Chronicle (CA) - November 12, 2015 - page A10  
November 12, 2015 | San Francisco Chronicle (CA) | Page A10

**Carol Doda**, who died Monday, provided frequent column fodder for the late Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Herb Caen. Here's a selection of some of Caen's entries about Ms. **Doda** over the years:

**Carol Doda**, first and greatest of the topless titans, is about to go straight. She is quitting the Condor next month for a non-topless acting career. Starting Jan. 20, when she will play Sadie Thompson (Sonny Tufts!!??) in a Keith Rockwell-Phil Sinclair production of "Rain" at the Encore Theater on Mason. This is the kind of high camp that would give nosebleeds to a Sherpa.

- Nov. 30, 1967

La Triviata: **Carol Doda** is back from H'wood, where she played a bit part (is that possible?) in the new Monkees-Victor Mature picture (is THAT possible?) titled "Untitled," and that's possible. Her name in the flick: Sally Silicone.

- March 22, 1968

One thing less to worry about: **Carol Doda** signed a new one-year contract at the Condor, having got the raise she was threatening to hold in for.

- Jan. 31, 1972

Channel 36 has dropped **Carol Doda**, the perfect 44, as its theme girl because she wanted a bit more loot, and I've seldom heard Miss Doodabs so worked up: "That place is so cheap they make the Condor (her home base) look like the Ford Foundation. I didn't want union scale, even, but what they offered was the minimum wage of a prune picker in the Napa Valley." I forget at what temperature silicone melts but she was becoming dangerously close.

- April 4, 1973

How big can you get? **Carol Doda**'s twin 44s will soon become part of the permanent collection at the SF Museum of Art, in the form of a loving cup to be fashioned of brass and gold by Sculptor Art Grant, with her very own ears in brass as the cup's handles. (Mary Miles Ryan is excused from the room for making cracks about "brass-ears.") The cup will be the booby prize for the Dumbest Car in

the Museum's First Annual Soap Box Derby at McLaren Park May 18, but the winner doesn't get to keep it. Museum property.

- Feb. 7, 1975

**Carol Doda** is not only a movie star, she has a captive audience: Like so: Charles MacCrone of Aptos, who makes training films for the police, has used Ms. **Doda** as the "distraction" in a captivating movie about shoplifting. In the most riveting sequence, our heroine plays her siliconed embonpoint for all they're worth, dazzling the dumb clerk, while her accomplice's hand empties the cash register.

- Dec. 10, 1976

**Carol Doda** quit the Condor last month but her name is still up in lights so she has commanded her lawyer, Haig Harris Jr., to file suit against Condor owner David Benson. "It's not fair to the tourists," pouts **Carol**. "They want the real things."

- Jan. 1, 1986

**Carol Doda**, who is afraid of planes and perhaps vice versa, took the train to Chicago to peddle her lingerie line and found a fellow airophobe, John Madden, on board. They became inseparable. "I did everything with him for two and a half days except sleep with him, " reports La **Doda**. "He taught me how to walk like a duck because that's the easiest way to get around on moving trains. Quack!" If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, duck.

- Nov. 3, 1986

Allen White recalls the night he and Liberace wandered into the Condor on Bawdway, where **Carol Doda** descended topless on a grand piano strung from cables. Afterward, Lib said to her: "What a coincidence - we both use Baldwins!"

-Feb. 9, 1987

**Carol Doda's** excellent legs sold for \$3,700 at auction during the big AIDS benefit last Sat. night. That is, Paul Gunther bought the lower half of the landmark sign that once graced Bawdway and Columburst. The upper half, with its blinking nippoos, is in the new non-topless Condor.

- Oct. 19, 1991



## North Beach History: The Birth Of Topless Dancing



Photo: Eric Molina/[Flickr](#)

By [Art Peterson](#) - Published on May 17, 2016.

[San Francisco](#) [North Beach](#)

*This is the first in a series of history posts from local historian, author and professor Art Peterson, who's given Hoodline permission to reprint some of his writing about North Beach and nearby neighborhoods. They appear in his local history book [Why Is That Bridge Orange?](#) and other previously published works.*

The [Condor Club](#), still in existence at Columbus and Broadway, is now somewhat subdued from its Dolce Vita beginnings. It is here that "Big Davey" Rosenberg invented San Francisco-style topless dancing. Weighing in at 400-plus pounds, Rosenberg was once described as "a belly closely followed by a man." He called himself "the world's greatest press agent," a claim the *Los Angeles Times* acknowledged "because of his bulk, few would quibble with."

In 1964, Rosenberg was employed as a publicist for the Condor. This club and the others in North Beach was doing a middling business by featuring caged young women in bikinis dancing The Swim, the Frug and the Watusi. That was before June 19th, when Rosenberg saw a Joseph Magnin newspaper ad for the Monokini by the designer Rudi Gernreich. The Monokini, a bikini without the top, had caused something of a stir when introduced in Paris. It was said that, unable to hire models to show his product, Gernreich recruited prostitutes.

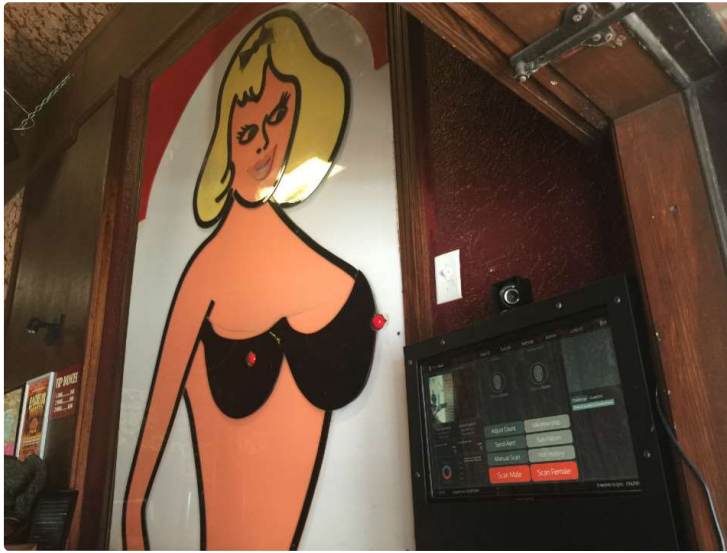
Seeing the ad, Rosenberg beelined to Magnin's and bought a \$25 Monokini. Returning to the club, he presented the garment to a cocktail waitress/go-go dancer named Carol Doda. Later that night, Doda made the most of her entrance, descending bare-breasted from the ceiling atop a grand piano. Mesmerized, patrons recognized this was a first.



News of the breast-baring spread rapidly, aided by the fact that delegates from the Republican convention were in town looking for diversion. Soon there were topless clubs all over North Beach; at one time, as many as 28. Doda was performing 12 shows a night.

Within months, the craze went national. There were topless restaurants, topless girl bands, topless shoeshine parlors and topless ice cream stands.

Recognizing that more is more, Doda underwent silicone breast injections. What had been a proportional 36-inch chest now expanded to an eye-popping 44 inches. Rosenberg made sure the mammary enhancements were insured by Lloyd's of London for \$1.5 million. The Condor installed a 40-foot sign out front, featuring a neon and nude version of Doda with blinking nipples.



*A portion of the blinking nipple sign is now*

*inside the door of the Condor. (Photo: Geri Koeppel/Hoodline)*

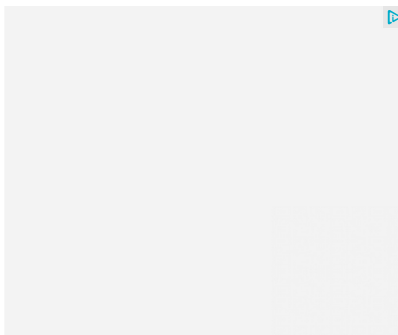
All this got the city fathers' attention. One supervisor wanted the Broadway clubs exposed as hangouts for "punks, muggers, cutthroats and molesters." The police chief responded that there were many fewer muggers and molesters in North Beach than in some other neighborhoods.

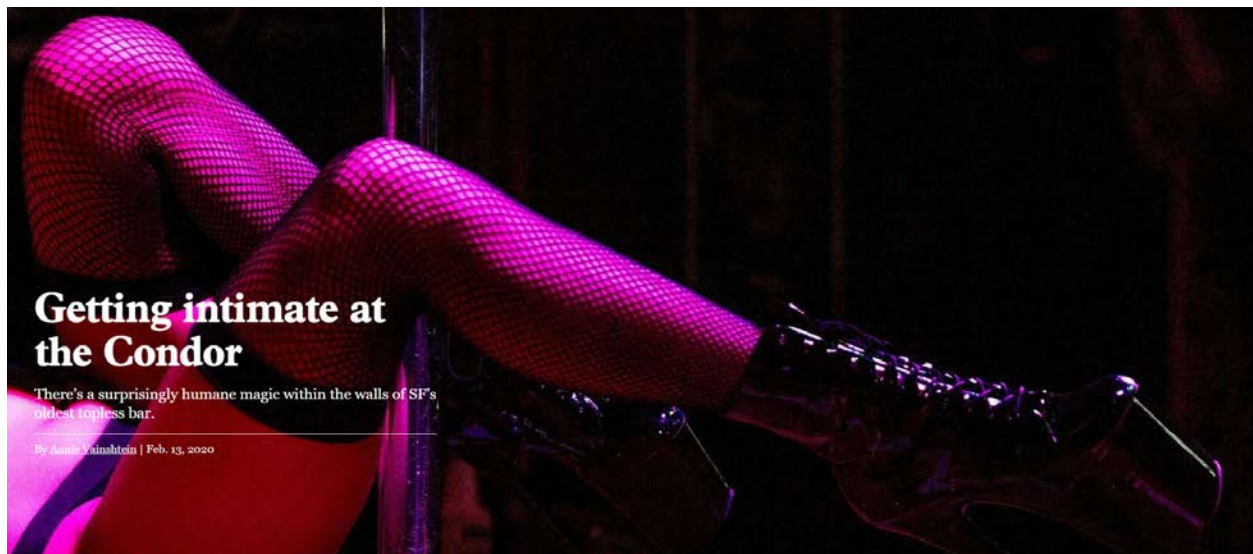
Not mollified, Mayor John Shelly insisted, "Topless is at the bottom of it all." Eventually, in April 1965, there was a police raid, rumored to have been provoked by a phone call from publicist Rosenberg. There was a trial, but the judge found that a bared breast as entertainment fell well within the boundaries of acceptable community standards.

By the 1970s, however, topless was pretty much old hat. In the 1980s, the neon nipples quit flashing, and someone provided the Doda caricature with a dance-hall skirt. In 1991, the sign came down. There was a campaign to donate it to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., but the museum director politely declined, saying the institution did not have room.

Supporters of the sign weren't so sure. As one admirer of the ribald topless era put it: "If they can find room for the [Enola Gay](#), they should be able to find room for Carol Doda." [Doda died at age 78](#) on November 9th, 2015, of complications related to kidney failure.

[San Francisco](#) [North Beach](#)





## Getting intimate at the Condor

There's a surprisingly humane magic within the walls of SF's oldest topless bar.

By Daniel Yankin | Feb. 13, 2020

She walked to the stage purposefully, holding a bejeweled purse in her hand. She didn't have to look at the audience to know they were watching her. She was somehow small but tall at the same time, with cropped hair that looked iridescent under the lights.

In a long bend with her back to the audience, she met the crowd's gaze between her Amazonian legs. She clutched the Clorox wipe and started the show, wiping down all the parts of the stripper pole she could reach. Then she walked a few steps to her left and shot the cloth into the recycling bin by the stage.

She missed. The unmoored wipe lay limp on the floor. Above it, a middle-aged man in a suit and dark Skechers appeared and picked it up. Order restored.

Since 2017, I've spent nearly 24 hours at the Condor Club, which claims to be the oldest strip club in San Francisco. I've been on weekdays, late on weekend nights, on good days, on off-days, and with friends — some of whom felt as much wonder as I did, and others who itched to go home.

In January 2020, these visits increased in frequency as I set out on a quest: I had to understand my fascination with the club. As a woman in her 20s who's in a heterosexual relationship, I've never wanted anything from the dancers, in the traditional sense. The strip club is not a space that has historically been coded for me as a patron; the average customers are straight men with expendable income. And yet, there at the Condor, I felt more awake to life than I had felt in years. What was so special about this place?

Some background: The Condor Club is [known as the world's first topless bar](#), thanks to a dancer named Carol Doda, who, in 1964, began performing wearing a topless "monokini" swimsuit. Chronicle columnist Herb Caen called her "the Susan B. Anthony of this particular liberating movement."





Dancers line up before making a signature stroll through the club to introduce themselves to patrons at the Condor Club in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Saturday, February 8, 2020. | Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

Doda's work elevated stripping beyond salacious entertainment, to an expansive and imaginative form of art. She told The Chronicle in 2009 that the minute she knew she existed in life was the night she started "the Condor thing."



A large piano used in performances from the early days of the Condor Club in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Friday, February 7, 2020. Famed dancer Carol Doda would descend from the piano to begin the evening's show. In 1983, a man was killed on the famous white piano when it was accidentally turned on. | Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

In the decades since, the club has waded back into headlines. It had its nude years, from 1969 to 1972, until bottomless dancing in clubs that served alcohol became illegal. In 1983, the Condor made the front

page of The Chronicle after a hydraulic piano crushed one of its workers. James “Jimmy the Beard” Ferrozzo, the club’s then-assistant manager, and his girlfriend — a dancer at the club — had been “entangled” atop the elevator piano when they accidentally activated the lever, sending them up to the ceiling. The couple was pinned between it and the wall for hours. Ferrozzo died on top of his girlfriend, who survived.

In recent years, the casual passerby could be forgiven for thinking the club blends in with the others on the Broadway strip. That’s what I figured the first time I went, around two years ago, with a friend who’d also never been to a strip club.



The Condor Club, which introduced topless entertainment in the 1960s, is switching to a fully clothed Barbary Coast style show. Seen here is dancer Rita Ricardo performing the last strip teaspoon New Year's Eve December 31, 1987. Photo ran 1/2/1988, P. A2 | Steve Castillo / The Chronicle 1987

We had our expectations. It would make us depressed, disconnected. It would be a portal to the city’s underbelly, a place where culture went to die — packed to the brim with aggression and submission. We expected a room where sexuality was plastic, a container for men who could only communicate by degrading others, and for women who were resigned to placation.

But what we found inside the Condor Club was not that. There, under the dim lights, the dancers’ athleticism was breathtaking. My stomach lurched as a woman hung upside down on the pole, then released both hands to unhook her bra, holding on by the delicate hook of her knee. Limbs moved in ways I didn’t know were possible.



Each performer was wholly herself, with a unique, expressive style that made the whole club feel diverse and dynamic. One of the older dancers stripped to Eric Clapton. Another hung upside down then made a silly face — tongue out, thumbs in her ears — like we were all toddlers at playtime. Another, who had struck us with her flexibility and catlike stare, sat between me and my friend and talked candidly about how stripping had given her insight into other people's desires.

Being part of the ecosystem, even for a night, was at once thrilling and meditative. The interactions between patrons, staff and performers were experimental theater, built on both reality and delusion. And watching the dancers glide face-down the pole activated something within me — I couldn't figure out if I wanted to spend all my money on these dancers or be onstage alongside them. Even after five hours, leaving felt impossible. I recall saying I could live there.

Later, describing the experience to other friends felt difficult and foggy, like trying to recount a dream. But I couldn't stop trying to explain it. Over the next few months, I became a Condor Club evangelist.



Lizzie holds up her tip money halfway through her shift while backstage at the Condor Club in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Saturday, February 8, 2020. | Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

On a trip to Los Angeles, I shepherded my reluctant friends toward a strip club. No one particularly wanted to go, but eventually I was convincing enough, and we filed in, paying a steep cover to enter what was almost certainly a converted Denny's. We watched feeble girls with droopy eyes sway across a low stage and withdraw into the background. There was no sense of connection or camaraderie. All I felt was sadness.

The vibrancy of the Condor Club seemed far away — a mirage.

On a recent Saturday night, I fill up my Nalgene and get in line to enter the Condor Club alone. The bouncer scans my license and I wait for my photo to disappear off the screen just by the door. Behind me, a woman in a glamorous coat is denied entrance: The system can tell she's been eighty-sixed before. That must be a mistake, she says. "I've been here like five times since then."

Inside, the space retains a kind of 1920s organ-lounge glamour — a white grand piano hangs from the ceiling alongside vintage chandeliers, photos of iconic entertainers and other memorabilia from the Doda days. The lighting is dim, the kind that makes everyone look better. Communal seats that encourage conversation — booths, leather benches and small bar tables — form a semi-circle around the main stage, which is backed by a mirror-panelled wall.



The illuminated sign of the Condor Club is seen on the corner of Broadway and Columbus Avenue the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Saturday, February 8, 2020. | Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

On each side of the stage is an entryway to the bar side of the club, which has a divey feel: TVs set to sports, bartenders offering Pringles. Dancers walk around between sets to mingle with patrons. Nearby, a smaller platform offers a stage for a warm-up dance, a teaser, by whichever performer is on deck for the main event. And then there's the staircase, which leads to the velvet-lined private rooms upstairs. On this particular Saturday, I take in the scene: two girls dance seductively by the bar while a timid-looking man processes sparring feelings of confusion and attraction. I exchange a few glances with two large old men with Santa Claus beards who are watching basketball on the big screen. Two younger men in skeleton onesies pass by; they seem almost an apparition.

Over the course of my visits, I become a devoted people watcher. I watch cheerful men dance to Blueface with the awkward rhythm of Sims characters. I watch off-duty dancers shower their friends with their hard-earned dollar bills, even — especially — on nights they make nothing. I watch a man in a plaid shirt sitting alone, drinking a glass of red wine, his backpack at his knees. I'm moved by an older couple in matching puffer jackets who seem truly delighted by the dancers twerking to trap. They look like they could be from Tiburon.

Observing the ancillary roles becomes a fixation. The male employee with the suit and Skechers picks up more crumpled paper towels, then rushes to push in chairs; the seating is not to be in disarray for even a moment. I am fascinated by the busboys, whose job it is to sweep, with a giant broom, the money made during each set. I see the bouncer walk to the door and retrieve a dinner delivery: Cheesecake Factory. Everyone is working — performing, placating, asserting power. Communicating to friends that they have money. Convincing oneself of something. If the Condor were a radio show, there would be no dead air.



Ravyn hangs upside down on the pole as she performs on the main stage at the Condor Club in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Saturday, February 8, 2020. | Jessica Christian, The Chronicle

It's exhilarating, but also exhausting. There is no real way to be idle, because everything is give-and-take. It occurs to me that audience members have some stake in controlling the show, so we're performing, too — we have to display enthusiasm and tip for the dancers to feel any incentive to dance. On a particularly slow night, I watch a dancer yawn as she looks out into the crowd.

One part of the evening that always captures my attention is after the first sequence of dances, when all the performers emerge to “Girls, Girls, Girls” by Mötley Crüe. They walk around the pole as the DJ announces them by name, then disperse into the crowd. Some make a beeline for the patrons who were generous during their sets, or might be potentials for a private session. Sales in action.



Vanity performs for patrons on the main stage at the Condor Club in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, Calif. Saturday, February 8, 2020. | Jessica Christian / The Chronicle



One night, I watch as one of my favorite dancers approaches a group of men with a finance vibe only to be cast aside. She has an appearance I can relate to — glasses, a soft stomach and slightly messy hair. In her sets, she commands the pole with impressive vigor and risk.

After being rejected, she waits by the door. I watch the rest of the girls move around like bees in a hive — toying, teasing, making deals. And then I watch as the men who rejected her turn their gaze to a girl with hairless skin and a body that looks like it's been crafted by VR.



Carol Doda inside the Condor Club Photos shot 02/1/1966 | Gordon Peters / The Chronicle 1966

The conversations stand out the most.

I had a puzzling encounter with a sports jersey-wearing double-arm amputee who had been at the club alone for the last five hours, the first person there at 4 p.m. He asked if I worked at Starbucks, and if my

name was Nicole. “I was going to go to Rasputin today to buy a CD,” he said, his breath hot in my ear. “But I didn’t know what to buy.”

I shared a bench with an elevator mechanic who was waiting for his friend to get off work at a nearby club. She was a stripper he met in Reno, and he brought her up with the compulsion of someone falling in love. He recently installed a pole in her house because she wanted to practice more. “Most people don’t know the poles actually spin,” he said, eyeing the stage as a dancer skidded down it and landed in a perfect split.

We talked about how he built his 1937 Ford from scratch, salsa dancing, why polyamory hadn’t worked for him, his recent trip to the American River. He pulled out his phone to show me photos of his friends jumping off rocks into the water. Then he zoomed in on the last photo he ever took of his dog that died. His eyes started welling up.

Eventually, it struck me that — in a San Francisco increasingly shaped by siloed-off people staring at their phones — the Condor allows for this kind of intimacy because it levels us. At the Condor, I can talk to the CEO of a major tech company about his childhood OCD. The obscenity, cultural shame and taboo inherent in the place — and in the choice to spend a Friday night watching women undress — all produce a freeing kind of energy. No matter what we tell ourselves or who we pretend to be in the world, we all crave connection, and this is a container for it.

Because who are we kidding? We’ve all chosen to be here. No one is better than anyone else.

On one of my last visits, a man slid into the love seat next to me. I had noticed him walking near me throughout the night, trying — I was sure — to place why I was there alone. His friends had “dragged” him there to celebrate his anniversary, he said. It’d been 12 years since he moved to America. “I don’t believe in the principle of strip clubs,” he told me, leaning in close as, nearby, a dancer swung her legs open into an impressively wide V-shape. I asked him why, and he moved in closer.

“I’m an old-school romantic,” he said. “The culture of money ruins the purity of love.”

He spent the next five minutes trying to get me to dance.

*Annie Vainshtein is a digital arts & entertainment reporter for The San Francisco Chronicle.*

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# LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**HEARING DATE: October 19, 2022**

*Filing Date:* September 21, 2022  
*Case No.:* **2022-009229LBR**  
*Business Name:* The Condor  
*Business Address:* 560 Broadway  
*Zoning:* NCD (Broadway Neighborhood Commercial) Zoning District  
65-A-1 Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 0145/013  
*Applicant:* Joseph Carouba  
560 Broadway  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Located In:* District 3  
*Staff Contact:* Alessandro Hall – (628) 652-7336  
[Alessandro.Hall@sfgov.org](mailto:Alessandro.Hall@sfgov.org)

**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

## Business Description

The Condor is an adult entertainment venue located at 560 Broadway in the North Beach neighborhood. Established by Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli in 1958, the business was a trailblazing promoter of topless dancing in the 1960s and has remained a fixture of the City's nightlife to this day.

Originally a neighborhood tavern, The Condor underwent a major renovation in 1961, when it expanded into the adjacent storefront and erected an elevated stage for performances. The business quickly became a popular venue for live music and dance; its nightly entertainment culminated with performances by Carol Doda, who descended from the ceiling on a hydraulic baby grand piano. In 1964, Doda made international headlines when she performed topless at The Condor, helping to launch an era of topless entertainment that swept across North Beach and the nation. The following year, when the San Francisco Police Department arrested Doda and other performers on indecency charges, Del Prete and Mattioli formed the Broadway Businessman's Association to coordinate a defense in court. The Condor's landmark legal victory established that topless dancing did not violate obscenity laws, set important case precedent related to censorship, and cemented San Francisco's reputation as a city that celebrates freedom of expression.

Now owned by Joseph Carouba of SAW Entertainment, The Condor continues to honor its pioneering legacy in the entertainment industry. The business features nightly topless dancing, hosts comedy shows and blues performances, and offers a full bar, bistro menu, and TV screens that broadcast live sports. The Condor is a popular choice for birthday, bachelor, and bachelorette parties, and draws a mix of tourists, conventioners, office workers, and curiosity seekers. The business is also active in the North Beach Community; Carouba founded the Top of Broadway Community Benefit District to help improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.

The Condor is located at 560 Broadway in a Category A (Historic Resource Present) structure on the northeast corner of Broadway and Columbus Avenue in the North Beach neighborhood. It is within the NCD (Broadway Neighborhood Commercial) Zoning District, a 65-A-1 Height and Bulk District, and the Telegraph Hill-NB Residential Special Use District. 560 Broadway was evaluated during the 1984 North Beach Historic Resource Survey and found to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## Staff Analysis

### Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1958.

2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. The Condor qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. The Condor has operated continuously in San Francisco for 64 years.
- b. The Condor has contributed to the history and identity of the North Beach neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. The Condor is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?*

No.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?*

Yes. The Condor is significant for its association with San Francisco entertainment history and the proliferation of topless dancing in the United States. In 1965, San Francisco Police Department officers and agents of the California Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control raided The Condor, arresting performer Carol Doda for indecent exposure and owners Gino Del Prete and Pete Mattioli for running a disorderly house. All three were acquitted in May of 1965, in a court case that established that topless dancing in North Beach clubs did not violate obscenity laws. The case had important ramifications for censorship, freedom of expression, and entertainment in the United States.

The Condor is also closely associated with Carol Doda, who worked at the club for several decades. Her topless performances generated international headlines, quickly propelling her to stardom as one of the nation's first adult entertainment celebrities. Doda remained a San Francisco icon until her death in 2015

**5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?***

No. Although 560 Broadway Street is not currently listed on a historic resource registry, it was evaluated during the 1984 North Beach Survey and determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

**6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?***

No, not as of the date of this Executive Summary. However, the business is located within the boundaries of the community sponsored North Beach Survey, which is currently underway.

**7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?***

Yes. There have been numerous articles on The Condor and profiles of Carol Doda published in the San Francisco Chronicle over the years. The 1965 court case, dubbed the "The People versus The Condor," received widespread coverage in the press and a feature on KRON-TV news.

**Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business**

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 560 Broadway (1958 – Present)

**Recommended by Applicant**

- Exterior features of 560 Broadway including:
  - Brick façade
  - Historical plaque commemorating first topless and bottomless performances at The Condor
  - Neon "Condor Topless A-Go-Go" marquee
- Interior features including:
  - Remnant of blinking nipples neon sign
  - Wall-mounted piano on which Carol Doda performed
- Business services and programming including:
  - Daily live topless entertainment
  - VIP room service
  - Live adult comedy shows
  - Screening of sporting events

**Additional Recommended by Staff**

- Elevated stage for performances
- Mirror display behind stage
- Red leather booths

**Basis for Recommendation**

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
  - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
  - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
  - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation