

# Why did Bar K close? Members, employees detail KC bar’s ‘utterly devastating’ end

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Popular Kansas City dog bar of more than seven years Bar K closed overnight Tuesday, saying increased financial pressure and a myriad of other reasons led to its demise.

For some employees and members, it was an unexpected loss that has left them scrambling for a job or disputing hefty membership fees. But others say the writing had been on the wall for months.

Doe DeBruce, a member since the opening of the 2-acre Berkley Park location, said she and several others noticed a decline in the last year of Bar K’s life.

For one, there were increasingly fewer events for members. Bands stopped playing, and the food and beverage menu started to shrink.

The final straw for

many Bar K members came several months ago, when membership prices jumped dramatically. DeBruce is not sure exactly how much — her price stayed lower because she was an original member — but her fellow pet owners were dismayed by the change.

“A lot of people, when they increased the membership, decided to leave, which really hurt the business,” DeBruce said.

Another longtime member, Makenzie Brooks, said drink prices also jumped. A \$4 can of beer, for example, became \$7.

“That’s insane pricing margins,” she said. “That’s not doable.”

The most recent prices on Bar K’s website include a \$500 annual membership fee for unlimited visits to the park, or a \$50 monthly membership.

In a recent email sent to members, Bar K explained that there would be no membership refunds, saying they “do not have

the resources” but are working with local businesses to create benefits packages.

“They’re recommending people go through their credit cards to dispute it,” DeBruce said. “I have a lot of people I’m friends with who are members, and they’re not happy.”

Co-founders Leib Dodell and Dave Hensley began Bar K in a small space in the West Bottoms around 2017. Its massive property at 501 Berkley Parkway opened in 2018.

DeBruce, who socialized some with the owners, thinks things started to sour as Bar K tried to expand outside of KC — first with St. Louis in 2021, then with Oklahoma City in early 2023.

“They did so well in Kansas City,” DeBruce said. “Then they bought Oklahoma City and St. Louis, and we thought, ‘They’re spreading themselves too thin.’”

In August 2023, Arizo-

na-based Real Estate firm Diversified Partners announced its plans to acquire Bar K and make it a nationwide chain with 100 locations, moving its headquarters to Scottsdale.

Later that year, the Business Journal reported that the deal had fallen through. Bar K retained its three locations but did not open any others.

Last year, developer Green Street sued Bar K, alleging that its St. Louis location owed nearly \$300,000 in unpaid rent, according to records filed in St. Louis Circuit Court.

Green Street voluntarily dismissed the case a month later.

In a statement on Bar K’s website, the company said there “isn’t one single cause” that created the company’s downfall. Some of the reasons listed: inflationary costs and expenses, the labor market and increased consumer spending.

The Kansas City loca-

tion in particular suffered from the construction along the Riverfront, the company alleged. Earlier this month, it temporarily closed for three days as the street was blocked off for construction. It reopened business as normal after.

As for the employees, that’s another sad story, said Victoria Darity.

She and her colleagues woke up Tuesday to an email informing them they no longer had a job. They are still waiting on their final paycheck as of Wednesday, she said, and their insurance will expire after Thursday.

Darity, a single mother, is angry that upper management did not give employees more notice.

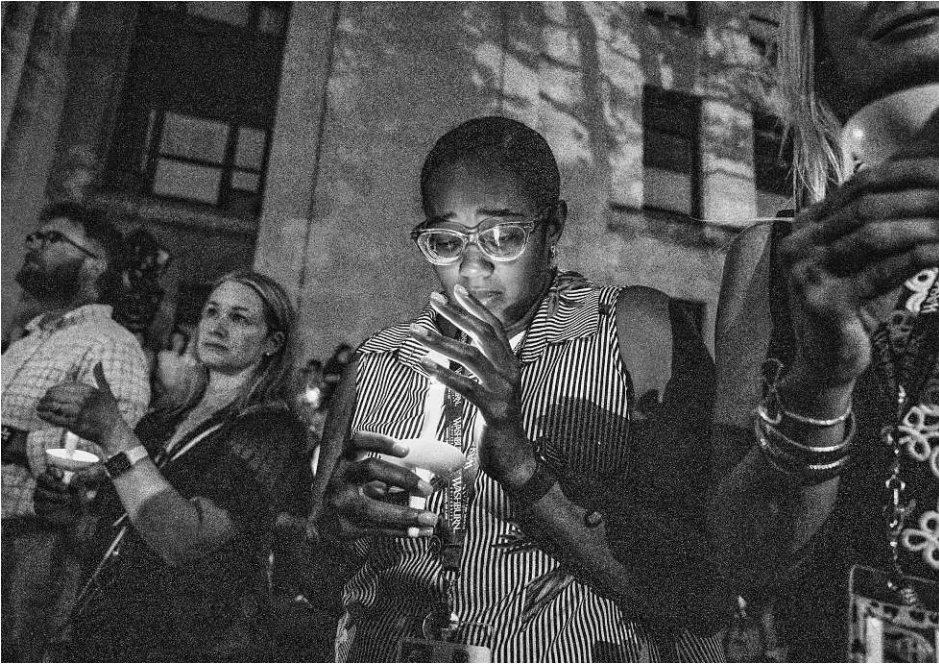
“I have a 5-year-old daughter who depends on me,” she said. “That was my only income.”

She echoed issues of construction in the area, the heat and increased membership costs. She also saw issues of high turnover and employees’ hours being cut.

There aren’t any other dog bars in the metro. Brooks said she’ll be taking her wiener dog to CityDogs — a downtown dog park, doggy day care and boarding center. She hopes someone else will take on the Riverfront property.

“People that live in the city need somewhere to run their dogs,” she said.

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Judge Candice Alcaraz watches her candle during a candlelight vigil held for Elijah Ming outside the Wyandotte County Courthouse on Wednesday.

## FROM PAGE 1A DEPUTY

said. “That guy who had your back. That guy who could light up your darkest day with just a smile. That guy who showed up when others walked away.”

The reverend, teary-eyed, told the crowd the nation needed a “cultural shift.”

“We cannot let Elijah’s death go in vain,” Fletcher said. “We cannot keep burying our brothers and sons and sisters. We cannot keep covering up cycles of domestic abuse, and excusing gun violence as normal.”

Monica Randle, principal of West Park Elementary School, recounted her days teaching Ming while he was in school.

“He had manners,” Randle said. “And I can remember many, many, many ‘yes ma’ams, no ma’ams.’ If there’s nothing else, he had manners.”

As the crowd lit their candles, Kansas City, Kansas Police Department Chaplain Sister Therese Bangert said Ming was an “uplifter.”

“Deputy Ming was a man who seemed to live in a stance of lifting people up,” Bangert said. “He was an uplifter.”

Candles flickered in the wind as the vigil came to a close with a rendition of ‘Amazing Grace,’ sung by Lee’s Summit Police Department Officer Nathan Cantrell.

Ulloa, the KCK police officer, said the event was a “beautiful service” to honor Ming.

“I couldn’t have said it any better, (Ming was) a bright light to everyone that I could work with,” Ulloa said, teary-eyed. “He would always smile. He brought happiness to everyone on his shift.”

## OTHER OFFICERS WHO DIED IN SHOOTINGS

Ming’s death was not the first Ulloa had seen in his time at the department.

The man also worked with Deputy Sheriff’s Patrick Thomas Rohrer and Theresa Sue King, who were fatally shot while transporting an inmate in 2018; Capt. Robert Melton, who was fatally shot while attempting to apprehend a suspect in a drive-by shooting in 2016; and Det. Brad Lancaster, who was fatally shot near the Kansas Speedway in 2016.

“It hurts. It’s like a new scab being ripped off every single time,” Ulloa said. “It feels like you just cannot get a break and have time to heal.”

Of the six police shootings that have occurred during Ulloa’s tenure, five resulted in death.

“It happens way too much here in our community, and the violence needs to stop,” Ulloa said.

## MING WAS RESPONDING TO A CALL WHEN HE WAS SHOT

Ming was responding to a call for service around

3:30 p.m. Saturday in the 2600 block of South 30th Street with other law enforcement officials to help an individual move items out of a residence.

A man later identified as Shawn Harris, 38, confronted Ming from inside the house and opened fire, striking Ming, according to a press release from Wyandotte County Sheriff’s Department Media Relations Specialist Grace Jacobs.

Officers from the Kansas City, Kansas Police Department and the Wyandotte County Sheriff’s Office exchanged gunfire with Harris before the man barricaded himself inside the home, police chief Karl Oakman previously told The Star.

Harris exited the home around 5 p.m. Saturday after a negotiation, Oakman said. He was injured by gunfire, but remained in stable condition.

The Kansas Bureau of Investigation will investigate all aspects of the shooting, sheriff Daniel Soptic told reporters at a press conference Saturday evening.

## SUSPECT HAS LENGTHY CRIMINAL HISTORY IN KANSAS, MISSOURI

Harris was charged in Wyandotte County Monday with capital murder and criminal possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. He is being held in the Johnson County Detention Center on a \$2 million bond.

The Wyandotte County District Attorney’s Office has not decided if Harris will face the death penalty in the capital murder charge. For the criminal possession of a weapon charge, Harris faces 7 to 23 months in prison.

Harris has a robust criminal past in both Kansas and Missouri. He was released from custody last year, and completed post-release supervision requirements in December.

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The Kansas City skyline is seen from Penn Valley Park on Wednesday, May 8, 2024.

## FROM PAGE 1A BUILDING

production to local students.

“The 800 Grand project represents a significant investment in Kansas City’s urban core, pairing historic preservation with bold new construction. Saving the historic Scarritt Building is vital to the Grand corridor and our greater downtown,” Jon Stephens, president and CEO of Port KC, said in a statement. “This development aligns with Port KC’s mission to attract catalytic growth and sustainable economic vitality to our city.”

The full project is expected to be built in two phases over five years, starting with the hotel.

During a meeting on Monday, the Port KC Board of Commissioners took a step toward approv-

ing a financing plan that includes about \$26.6 million in property tax exemptions over 20 years. The development would generate about \$12.2 million in property tax revenue during that time, which is millions more than if the site remained undeveloped.

Officials said Monday that there could be further support from the city, and the project could take advantage of tax credits for rehabbing historic buildings.

The Scarritt Building announcement arrived after the building has experienced issues like theft and fires, according to a Port KC presentation.

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## BIRTHDAYS: AUGUST 1

### Britannica

Biographical information from August 1 is from Encyclopaedia Britannica. Explore more at [britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com).  
**Sam Mendes**, English director (b. 1965).  
**Yves Saint Laurent**, French designer (b. 1936).  
**Meir Kahane**, Israeli political extremist and rabbi (b. 1932).  
**Henrietta Lacks**, American medical patient (b. 1920).  
**Herman Melville**, American author (b. 1819).  
**Maria Mitchell**, American astronomer (b. 1818).  
**Claudius**, Roman emperor (b. -10).

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