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Crowbar, Ybor City's last full-time music venue, is closing. What happens next?

No one wants this concert venue to go away. Its owner is on a mission to save others like it.



Fans watch from the crowd as Lesa Silvermore performs at Crowbar on Saturday, Jan. 17, 2026, in Ybor City. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

By **Gabrielle Calise** Times staff

| Updated Yesterday

It's 4 p.m. on a Friday, and Crowbar owner Tom DeGeorge is very busy.

Outside his office window, roosters crow as local bands drag their gear into the music venue ahead of a January soundcheck. DeGeorge, 52, looks like a rock star himself with his denim on denim and long, grizzled beard. He sips from a Coke

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It seems like everyone — bands, bookers, journalists, other people like DeGeorge who run independent rooms across the country — wants a piece of him. Crowbar hosts about 300 events a year, and everybody is dying to get on his calendar one last time.

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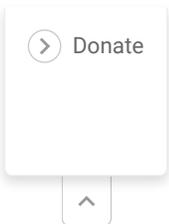
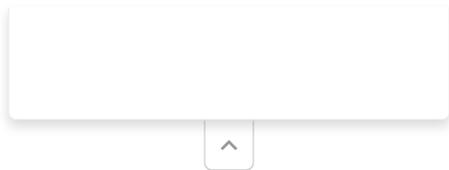
“The next six months are going to be, in my opinion, the greatest six months that Crowbar has ever had,” DeGeorge said.

Crowbar turns 20 this year. It is the last full-time independent music venue in Ybor City, and it's going to close at the end of the summer.

The venue at 1812 N. 17th St. isn't a restaurant where bands are squeezed into a corner stage or a brewery that hosts events in a courtyard. Nor is it a hybrid space like the Ritz, divvying up nights between dance parties, raves, DJs and concerts. It's one big room with a patio outside, wallpapered with gig posters and band stickers and Sharpie graffiti, dedicated solely to live music.

But DeGeorge isn't closing Crowbar because he's stopped believing in the power of live music.

This is part of his plan to save venues like it.





Crowbar owner Tom DeGeorge opened the venue 20 years ago with partner Devin Norton. "I never wanted to do anything but host awesome concerts," he said. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

An Ybor City legend is born

Ybor City, known for its Latin roots and cigar factories, became an [artist's playground in the 1980s and '90s](#). Funky bookstores and music studios moved in thanks to cheap rent following the economic downturn of the '60s and '70s. By the early 2000s, the neighborhood was home to a cluster of venues on and around Seventh Avenue: [New World Brewery](#), the Orpheum, Czar, the [Masquerade](#), and later, Crowbar.

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"There were constantly shows at each one of them," said Tampa music promoter Joe D'Acunto. "Just bouncing around from each one to each one. ... It was like a whirlwind."



Antro Banks performs onstage at Crowbar on Jan. 17 in Ybor City. "We're cultural institutions that are safe spaces, that help build communities," said Crowbar owner Tom DeGeorge. "But sometimes that's

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mouth doing the work. The Masquerade opened in 1987 and became a hot spot for alternative bands like Nirvana and the Sugarcubes. It eventually moved to the present-day location of the Ritz — and from 2001 to 2006, it was run by a young DeGeorge.

He'd graduated with a criminal justice degree from Penn State in 1997, where he spent nights working security at local venues. He put together security plans at arena shows for bands like Metallica, but his favorite spot was an 800-person venue near campus that could stuff in 1,400 during football weekends. While artists like Joan Jett, Marilyn Manson and Matchbox 20 performed, DeGeorge was onstage, side stage or leaping into the pit to manage the crowd.

The venue's name: Crowbar.

"I was never watching the bands," said DeGeorge, who was 21 when he started. "I was listening and getting hyped up to jump in. Maybe because it was at Penn State, but it always felt like you were playing a football game or something."

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An internship for the 1996 Olympics brought DeGeorge to Atlanta, and he returned after graduation. A management gig at the Masquerade in Atlanta eventually took him to Florida, where he ran the club's Ybor City location.

In 2006, DeGeorge heard that his old college club had shuttered. As he and a partner planned to open their own venue in Ybor, DeGeorge paid homage by naming it Crowbar.



A poster from the grand opening of Crowbar is seen on the wall of the venue in Ybor City. The venue has since hosted thousands of concerts, DJ nights and events from weddings to funerals. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

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Bones have taken Crowbar’s stage. D’Acunतो has attended weddings and fundraisers there, too.

“It’s been kind of a musical church, if you will,” he said.

Musician and [promoter](#) Andres Hernandez spent his teenage and college years at Crowbar — first in the audience, and then playing bass in his band Rohna.

“It feels like a cool dive bar, but it’s a sizable venue. It has great sound,” said Hernandez, who calls DeGeorge a mentor. “The goal was like, ‘OK, once our local band is finally able to play at Crowbar, we’ve made it.’”

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Indie Night founder and bassist Andres Hernandez performs with his band Rohna at Crowbar in Ybor City in June 2023. The Indie Night concert series got started at Crowbar and will celebrate its history at the venue with two final shows there on May 15-16. [AMANDA LAFERRIERE @AJPGPHOTO | Courtesy of Amanda Lafferiere]

Ticket scalpers and rising costs

During the 2010s, artists from across the country would tell DeGeorge: if they were coming to Tampa, they were coming to Crowbar.

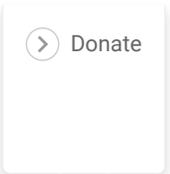


anged in March 2020.

to close for seven months. Nothing has been stable since.



It’s not just his room that hasn’t bounced back. According to [The State of Live](#), an economic research study from the National Independent Venue Association, roughly 65% of U.S. venues like Crowbar are not sustainable.



Across the country, more venues are closing than opening, DeGeorge said.

DeGeorge volunteers as the group's southeast regional president, guiding more than 100 independently owned venues. Since COVID-19, DeGeorge has appeared on Fox News, CNN and Rolling Stone. He's met with leaders in the U.S. Department of Justice, which has opened an antitrust lawsuit against Live Nation and Ticketmaster.

He lobbied for the Save Our Stages Act, which provided \$15 billion in grants for venues, museums and other cultural institutions forced to sit vacant during the pandemic. DeGeorge received about \$417,000 from Save Our Stages.

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Even with those funds, Crowbar and other survivors faced a whole new mess of problems.



According to the State of Live economic research study commissioned by the National Independent Venue Association, rooms like Crowbar are top economic drivers – especially in the state of Florida. DeGeorge says Crowbar has been busier than ever, but ticket scalpers have taken a toll on the business, dipping into his drink and merch sales. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

One example: ticket scalpers. Tickets that started as \$25 on Crowbar's website have popped up for \$200 on platforms from third-party sellers, many of which now appear higher than his site in search results — something he says never happened before the pandemic.

...e, 'Oh, it's a sold-out show, this is awesome,' and then that night, it's ... go, 'What the f---? Where is everybody?'" DeGeorge said. "Those people have no way of being in my room now because you took my tickets."

He worries that 300-capacity venues like Crowbar will "get gobbled up" by Live Nation. And next, the 1,000- or 1,500-capacity rooms.

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going to cease to exist completely for a while, and that's a dangerous thing, because which artists get the opportunity to get their names out there?"



Exterior view of Crowbar, which will close later this summer after 20 years in Ybor City. "As I'm going forward, how do I make the biggest impact?" owner Tom DeGeorge said. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

DeGeorge cites rising costs like street parking, which a few years ago was free in some parts of Ybor but has since ballooned to about \$3 an hour. Parking fees for tour buses outside Crowbar, he said, are now "astronomical."

DeGeorge frequently leaves Florida to speak at policy summits, workshops and panels. Journalism nonprofit More Perfect Union followed him for a [2025 documentary about skyrocketing concert ticket prices](#). The video has over 2 million views on YouTube.

DeGeorge, a founding member of the Ybor Merchants Association, has been outspoken about how development is hurting businesses like his. After efforts to connect with local politicians were unsuccessful, DeGeorge decided to change tactics.

He launched a [campaign for City Council last year](#) when a seat opened up in District 5. He garnered just shy of 10% of the vote but has considered running again in 2027.

"It isn't surprising at all that Tom emerged as the guy to lead and organize and sneak," said Sean Watterson, who owns a venue called Happy Dog in Cleveland and sits on the board for the independent venues group.

Watterson said, DeGeorge has been instrumental in getting venues in Tampa Bay and Orlando emergency assistance after hurricanes.

"Part of that is just who Tom is, helping out others, but it's also the ethic of small, independent venue owners to help each other out," Watterson said. "Tampa's pretty f----- lucky to have Tom."

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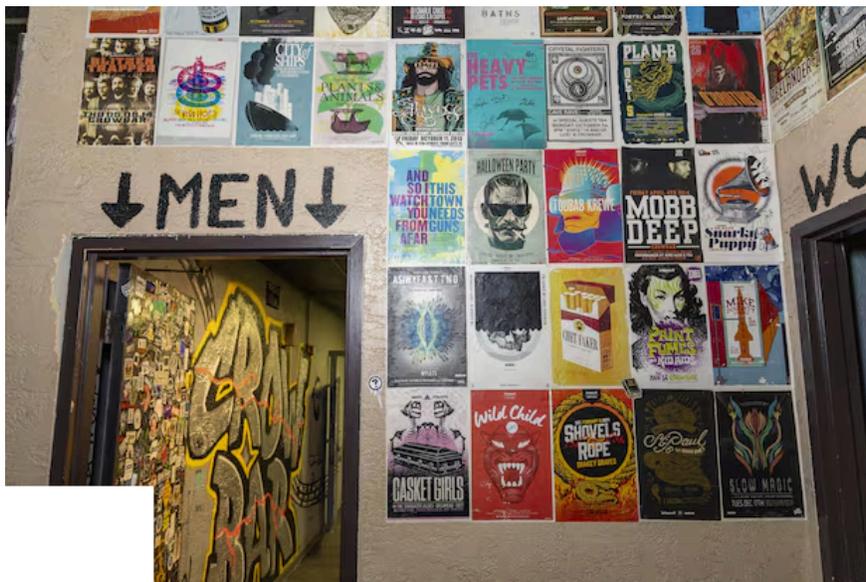
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country. NOT to mention he runs another standalone consulting company that organizes security and safety services for festivals and events.

"I feel selfish, trying to keep (Crowbar). I've had this for 20 years," DeGeorge said. "My bigger concern is making sure that these rooms don't go away forever, and if that means giving up my own room instead of trying to hold onto it, so I do have more time to fight for other rooms, I'm OK with that."



Despite Crowbar owner Tom DeGeorge's positive relationship with his landlord, he has still struggled with rising costs. "When an area develops, it raises the property value across the entire district, right? So now my landlord has to raise what he's asking for the rent," he said. "I can't pay that because my margins are so thin due to inflation, the higher cost of living, the higher cost of the market." [LUIS SANTANA | Times]



Posters highlighting previous live shows at Crowbar are seen on the walls throughout the venue. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

'A lot of hurrahs'

In the corner of Crowbar, bands sold hand-printed T-shirts and stickers for gas money. A woman onstage flipped her hair as she shredded on an hourglass-shaped

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It was the kind of night that DeGeorge loves, “these special moments where rooms like this go from being an empty concrete box, to being a really special environment.

“For that hour, no matter how you feel, what your political beliefs are, whatever, everybody’s together in that moment,” he said. “Even with sports, you got one side against the other, right? Music’s the only thing where truly everybody is in it together, all at once.”

DeGeorge wants to cram as many nights like this in as possible. It’s why, five years ago, he renegotiated his lease to make sure he could make it to 2026. He wanted to celebrate 20 years of Crowbar.

“People have asked me about, like, one big hurrah,” he said. “I think it’s going to be a lot of hurrahs.”

Friends kept stopping DeGeorge for hugs and first bumps, interrupting him as he stocked the bar and checked in with security.

Matt Stys, a college buddy who worked at the old Crowbar with DeGeorge, flew out from Colorado to catch a show. They’d lost touch but reconnected after Stys stumbled on the now-viral documentary. When he walked in, he smiled up at the wallpaper of show posters.

“This smells like Crowbar!” he said.

What if someone else wanted to keep the music going in this space? Could another venue owner pick up where DeGeorge is leaving off?

DeGeorge is not optimistic.

“With what they want to do with the rent and with what is happening with the district, I think it would be really tough,” he said. There are still the parking fees, the noise ordinances. “But if they can, more power to ‘em.”

Maybe live music’s future lies in those places that aren’t like Crowbar at all — the restaurants and breweries, the hybrid event spaces. DeGeorge is tired after years of 70-hour weeks. He’s ready for more time with his wife and their animals: three dogs, six indoor cats, a flurry of outdoor cats and a couple of raccoons.

... immediately about buying a building and opening a new venue in Tampa. he wouldn’t call it Crowbar.

... what’s best for my family?” DeGeorge said. “What’s best for my mental health?”

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Lesa Silvermore ends her set and shows love to fans and the venue Crowbar on Saturday, Jan. 17, 2026 in Ybor City. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

After this concert, DeGeorge will fly to New Orleans for a folk music conference and Colorado for a live music summit. He's working with Orlando Rep. Maxwell Frost on a bill to fix ticketing in Florida. Even his drives home get eaten up with Zooms. And then there are Crowbar's final months, which will be full of live music, merchandise and special events.

"You never know the last time you'll have the mic," he said. "I can't let off the gas."

Applause swallowed the rest of DeGeorge's thought; the members of a Tampa band called Pet Lizard stepped onto the stage, ready to rock.

DeGeorge clapped his hands together.

"OK," he said. "Let's go watch a concert."



Gabrielle Calise is a culture reporter who covers music, nostalgia and offbeat Florida trends. Reach her at gcalise@tampabay.com.

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KL

K. Lee 2 DAYS AGO

I've seen some amazing shows there. Our scene used to create so many local bands and host lesser-known touring bands. Since COVID, those artists try to gain likes/follows on social media and streaming services instead of playing live. Live music is getting reduced to bands that just play covers or arena

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C. Lim 2 DAYS AGO

I'm so glad this local music history and Crowbar's cultural impact have been documented! Thank you for all the work you put in to preserve live music, Tom. I'll forever cherish the memories I made at Crowbar!!!

REPLY 6 0

AC

A. Coustillac 2 DAYS AGO

Wow this is a great story. It's such a shame to see an incredible venue like Crowbar struggle to survive, especially when the owner is so on top of things the way Tom seems to be. Something in this economy has to give, because the maximization of profit at all costs, is ruining so many special human experiences. Long live Crowbar

REPLY 15 0

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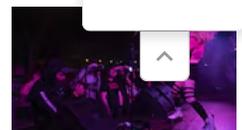
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