



*Local
Heroes*
2005

Gail & Bob **Hansen**

--OWNERS OF AN S. B.
MUSICAL INSTITUTION--

In the music industry, Santa Barbara's SOhO Restaurant & Music Club is known as an "elevator" venue. To get to the top, you've got to stop there. And as your career fades, and you're on the way down, you probably will stop there again for old times' sake. SOhO is more than an elevator, though. Under the direction and with the vision of owners Gail and Bob Hansen, in the last decade it has become a Santa Barbara institution.

When it is not hosting benefits for diverse nonprofit groups, SOhO is allowing young musicians, like the local high school and college jazz bands, to turn the venue into a swinging salute to music. It is perhaps most famous for giving aspiring singer-songwriters a place to introduce their music and then take it into the world. "There are a lot of local musicians who wouldn't have an opportunity if we weren't around," Bob said.

The Hansens are old-school in many ways, but none more important than that they believe in family. Bob's dad is the volunteer bookkeeper. Sister Kim books the music and manages the entertainment. Daughter Michelle is a waitress and manager. Son Rob started out as a doorman and now works in local radio. Sons Tyler and Zach work as busboys and odd-jobbers.

Bob's background is in restaurants, including a stint as vice president of operations at Carrows when it was being operated by a string of corporate companies. Tired of the commute to corporate headquarters in Irvine, he teamed up with Gail to buy what had been mainly a restaurant in Victoria Court in 1994. Bob gives much of the credit for the success of SOhO to Gail's personal contact with bands, customers, and the community. "We have a niche of quality, live entertainment in an intimate setting, with Gail's personal touch."

Music has always been an important part of Santa Barbara's deep, rich culture. For the last decade, the Hansen family's SOhO has been the place where that music was born and raised.