

# Open Bar: My Journey in Opening a Billiard Room and Sports Bar

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## A Baptism by Fire

I think it's important to explain the ordeals my partner and I experienced when opening Danny K's Billiards and Sports Bar. Opening a business of this size is not for the timid or faint of heart. Baptism by fire is an understatement.

We wanted to be the very best of any poolroom in the country, but found it increasingly difficult to raise money. In 1993 when we first looked at Danny K's location and knew this was the right place, we were filled with anticipation and excitement for the business we would generate and money we would make. One problem—the economy was going through a mild recession, and funds were difficult to come by.

My partner Richard mortgaged his home for a quarter of a million dollars, and was certain that he could come up with more money. I had some cash, and I had the ability to get some credit, but my main contribution was my expertise and general knowledge of how to build and operate a business such as this.

Money started running out even before we opened. Even though we used existing restrooms, plumbing, etc., we added a four-piece crown molding that ran the entire perimeter of Danny K's. It took a full five weeks to complete the crown molding alone, and the expenses just kept building. (The crown molding still looks great, so it was worth it in the end, I think.)

Then the plumber realized that the plumbing we had installed was not to code, and the pipes all needed to be replaced. Also, I had okayed slate for the restroom floors. Big mistake. The health department requires a light, neutral color for the kitchen and restroom floors. The slate had to be jack-hammered out and replaced by a typical kitchen floor tile. All this took extra time and money. We had to open soon, because we were already in the hole.

We opened with only beer and wine, because the owners of the building at the time did not want hard alcohol sold on their premises.

And so, even though we opened with a flourish, business slowed down due to our lack of hard alcohol. There were other factors as well, but this was the most prominent. I spoke with a liquor distributor from Southern Wine and Spirits, and asked him how selling liquor would affect gross sales. He said about 20 percent. That may not seem like a lot, but he turned out to be close to accurate, and with the pour cost on alcohol being lower, it made a big difference.

I got married four months after Danny K's opened, and so now I had a wife to support (she was working—thank God) on top of teetering on the edge of going out of business. My partner and I would write ourselves a small paycheck, so we could meet our own personal expenses, only to have those checks bounce. And if those checks didn't bounce, then one here or there sent to a purveyor would not clear. The wolves were at the door, and the snouts were poking through.

While standing at the bar one day making a delivery, the Budweiser driver looked me in the eye and said, “What are you going to do when this place takes a dump?” He may as well have stuck me in the side with a harpoon. We were so close to going under that deliveries would soon be demanding cash, and we had no cash. Then came the icing on the cake: our rent check had not gone through, and a county marshal came to the bar, and yelled so everyone could hear, “Pay rent or quit.” This was an order from the landlord. I was not at the business when this happened, but the bartender called me.

We were in dire straits.

My mother came out from Texas on another visit, and looked at our profit and loss statement. She told us that we were making a profit, but we owed so much in opening costs that the money was all going out to creditors. She said we needed to stop spending money, and ASAP. So I told my partner Richard to not spend a dime unless I knew what the expense was, and I cut Danny K’s spending to the bone. We began to eke out a profit.

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