

Inside Summers on the Beach

BY JESSICA GRAVES

Fort Lauderdale in the '80s was a neon-drenched playground where rock was loud, hair was bigger, and the drinking age was 18. The Strip had long been a famous Spring Break hotspot, but in the era of excess, Summers on the Beach became its epicenter, drawing massive crowds and legendary bands in an anything-goes atmosphere that defined a decade.



Hot Buns Contest

The couple, who first met at the famed Mutiny in Miami, shared a deep love for music and were responsible for Summers' meteoric rise. A recent University of Miami tax law graduate with an entrepreneurial streak, Allan had built a successful screen-printing business. "I opened up three T-shirt stores," he recalls. "I was selling T-shirts to the guy who owned the club. A few years later, he asked me to help him with his retirement plans. Then he said, 'Listen, I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse—buy my bar.'"



L-R: Allan and Suzanne Migdall with Kris Kristofferson

would draw a crowd," Allan admits. "We even had a bear that would wrestle people. He was muzzled and declawed, but he knew how to take you down. At first, I wasn't sure if they'd allow it, but the police came in, the building department came in, and finally, they said, 'Okay, you can do it, but you need two park rangers on stage.' So, we had two park rangers standing by while the bear wrestled people."

"It was madness," recalls Suzanne. "We were the number one draft account for Budweiser in the state

Summers was the spring break backdrop for MTV segments in the '80s

"For the first six months, we had a friend manage the club for us," recalls Suzanne. "We were still living in Miami, but we'd come up on weekends. Then, after our first New Year's Eve, when we saw the lines of people, we said, 'We gotta move here.' So we moved to the Marine Tower on Las Olas."

Summers on the Beach quickly made a name for itself with high-energy crowds and over-the-top promotions. The club's legendary wet T-shirt contests, beer chug relays, and belly flop contests became must-see events. "We basically did anything that

of Florida. The radio stations would run live shows from our patio. Jim McBean would do his morning show right on our front patio, and people would just show up from the beach. We were working with WSHE, K102, Y100, 97GTR, all of them."

South Florida's new "Home of Rock 'n' Roll" attracted some of the biggest names in rock, punk, reggae, and pop. Legendary acts like David Crosby, The Bangles, Cheap Trick, Gregg Allman, Soundgarden, Skid Row, Iggy Pop, and Jane's Addiction graced its stage, turning Summers into a premier destination for live



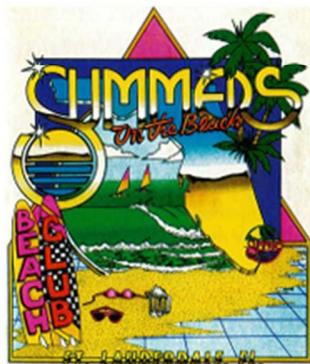
music. Recalls Allan of their early days, "When we booked Joan Jett, her record wasn't even number one yet. By the time she played the club, 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll' was number one in the country. Obviously, the show was sold out way in advance."

Summers became the backdrop for MTV segments, broadcasting the electric atmosphere of Spring Break to millions of viewers worldwide. "When Adam Curry and the MTV crew showed up," says Suzanne, "it was like we had hit the big time. They brought cameras and an energy that took the club to another level. The radio stations were freaking out because of 'Video Killed the Radio Star.' They thought MTV was going to ruin them. But for us, it was great. We got worldwide exposure."

Highlighted by MTV, major feature films, and coverage from top publications like *Playboy*, *The Miami Herald*, and *The Fort Lauderdale News/Sun Sentinel*, Summers on the Beach quickly cemented its status as a cultural landmark.

On any given night, college kids packed Summers, with lines stretching down the block to the Elbo Room. "The fire marshals would come in, trying to count how many people we had inside," recalls Suzanne. Despite being competitors, the other club managers from Elbo Room, Penrod's, The Button, and The Candy Store looked out for each other. "If code enforcement was coming, they'd call ahead," says Allan with a grin. "We had a pool in the back, so when it got too crowded, we'd announce: 'Drink specials at the pool!' and people would head outside."

Celebrities also frequently visited, including Jon Bon Jovi, who was spotted hanging out at the back bar when Skid Row played, and even Johnny Depp, who performed with his early band, The Kids, though as Suzanne recalls, "He wasn't



famous yet."

Eventually, Fort Lauderdale began shifting away from its Spring Break reputation, driven by city officials eager to attract a more upscale, family-friendly crowd. "It was complicated," shares Suzanne. "The city could never decide whether they wanted to promote Spring Break or not. At first, they did. But by 1986, they started cracking down."

Open container laws were strictly enforced, AIA was restructured to deter cruising, and aggressive towing policies discouraged student visitors. Media coverage began painting Spring Breakers in a negative light, further discouraging tourism. With the city's advertising budget for Spring Break promotions slashed and competing destinations like Daytona Beach, Miami Beach, and Cancun aggressively marketing to students, Fort Lauderdale's party scene dwindled. The writing was on the wall for Summers on the Beach. "In 1986, we still had a huge year," says Allan, "but by 1987, Spring Break numbers dropped significantly."

By 1992, with the city actively discouraging college tourism and six months after Suzanne had given birth to the couple's son, Summers on the Beach closed its doors for the final time. Allan continued his career in law, finance, and business ventures. Suzanne went on to become a film and television producer, most recently serving as the Executive Producer for Anna

Nicole Smith: *You Don't Know Me* on Netflix.

Summers on the Beach may be gone, but its spirit lives on in the memories of those who were lucky enough to experience it. As Suzanne puts it, "I would love to live the entire '80s again — the music, the club, the Summers family, Spring Break — the decade was, as many say, some of the best years of my life."



The Migdalls with Matthew & Gumar Nelson from the band Nelson



Suzanne Migdall with MTV DJ Adam Curry



The Migdalls at Summers closing * April 30, 1992



The Migdalls with Florida Governor Bob Martinez



The Migdalls with lead singer Eric Burdon from The Animals

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