

## FORMER HOMESTEAD LOUNGE GETS GREEN LIGHT TO OPEN

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Herald-Citizen Photo/Camille Fliss

Gail Swank, former owner of the Wagon Wheel and new owner of the Homestead Lounge, works on repairing a ceiling fan at the Baxter restaurant and bar, while in the background, Angie Hurst paints the entrance door. The Homestead, which was closed earlier this year by the town for several violations, is expected to open back up this week.

**BAXTER** -- The former Homestead Lounge in Baxter has received the green light to open again for business.

By receiving approval for both on-premise and off-premise beer permits Thursday, the popular town bar and restaurant could open as soon as this week. It's been just over eight months since the Homestead was closed in January for violations of its permits, which included illegal liquor sales, gambling machines and marijuana.

But the town has since tweaked its ordinances, allowing the restaurant to open before its year-long suspension had lapsed. Violations such as the ones the Homestead received will now follow the permit holder instead of the owner of the business, which allowed Gail Swank, former owner of the Wagon Wheel, to apply for two beer permits last month. It's been less than six months since her restaurant and bar was completely destroyed by fire.

The town board's approved the process with the understanding that Swank would not rebuild at her former downtown location.

And last week, the town's dry spell was officially ended as the Baxter Beer Board unanimously approved both permits for Swank, one of which would allow beer to be sold via the building's drive-through window. Alderman Robert Vinson was absent for that meeting.

The earlier opening date was also figured positively into the town's budget for this year. A total of \$57,235 has been budgeted for the 2008-2009 fiscal year from wholesale beer tax -- which comes from beer sales at various locations -- but that figure was increase by \$3,000 from what had been allotted in earlier budget proposals.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Tuesday, Sep 09, 2008

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