

High Profile

Sunday, January 27, 1991

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Section E



PHOTO: David Woo

Jeff Swaney in front of a Deep Ellum mural

FACES

Jazzing up Deep Ellum

By Joyce Saenz Harris

Jeff Swaney likes to call himself "a maverick, a free spirit." But, at 32, he's also a baby business mogul — one with Deep Ellum in his soul.

"I believe in the grass-roots element down here, because I'm a part of it. I'm a pioneer of it," Mr. Swaney says.

When Mr. Swaney came to Deep Ellum six years ago, there were only a half-dozen bars and restaurants in the area. The historic neighborhood that gave birth to the Dallas blues sound was mostly forgotten, save for a few offbeat entrepreneurs with more ideas than money.

Today, there are 57 bars and restaurants in the Deep Ellum area, and it has become a magnet for the cutting-edge players in Dallas' art and music scene. Mr. Swaney's nightspots, including Club Clearview and the Art Bar, have been among the area's principal venues for new music.

New Bohemians made their first appearances at the 500 Club; the Buck Pets played his clubs early in their career, and so did Mark Griffin "before he became MC 900 FT Jesus." Fever in the Funkhouse, another Dallas band on the rise, also is a popular draw at

Club Clearview.

"We were always willing to give new bands a chance to play," Mr. Swaney says. He now is preparing to open another club, the Blind Lemon Urban Bar and Bistro, in late March.

Mr. Swaney is promoting three concerts this year through Deep Ellum Special Events, and he has been active in the Deep Ellum Action Coalition, a neighborhood association that works to keep the area clean and safe. During the past three years, he has expanded into commercial leasing with Delphi Group Real Estate Services.

Mr. Swaney grew up in Royal Oak, Mich., and earned a degree in business and engineering from Michigan State. He spent four years working for Hewlett Packard; then he backpacked around the world, solo, for 14 months. He still travels as often as possible, and hopes to go to Africa someday.

But for now, he's busy at home. "We've got a real neat diversity here," Mr. Swaney says of Deep Ellum.

"I want to be commercially successful, sure. But by the same token, I don't want to sell out. I want this to be an original, cool, fun, funky place."