

NEW CLEAR DAYS

THE CHEAPEST IN TOWN

KNOW WHERE IT'S AT

BY CORTNEY OWINGS

New Clear Days is selling records without selling out. Ain't no workin' for the man at this joint. They are The Man.

"A motto?"

The two guys behind the counter debated the question.

"The cheapest in town," Chris offered.

"I was thinking we could steal the motto off the back of the Tubes' album," Dan said.

"Credibility, growth, direction."

Anywhere else the obscure reference to the now-defunct '80s band might seem odd. But not at New Clear Days — a store that got its name from an album by the New Wave band the Vapors and is owned by two guys with musical tastes as diverse as the Buzzcocks and the Dream Syndicate.

Chris Bickel and Dan Cook opened New Clear Days in June 1994 across from the Horseshoe on Sumter Street. Both University of South Carolina graduates had grown tired of "working for The Man" when they decided to open the record store.

"I had planned on opening a store with another guy and it just didn't pan out," Chris said. "I'd

given up on the idea, then this came up. I talked to Dan about it. He was the most responsible person I knew that also wasn't too happy with his situation."

"It was an opportunity that came along," Dan said. "A record store had been here and the owner wanted out of the business. We only had about a week to think about it."

The two guys spent the next week thinking over the decision and getting their money together. Then, they made their offer to the owner, a guy they simply refer to as Fred. Not long after, the store, which specializes in punk, underground and vinyl (but "has something for everyone"), opened its door.

Although Fred has not owned the place for almost three years, Dan and Chris keep a reminder of the former owner on the mantle in the center of the store — Camera #1. Fred, who is legally blind, kept the the small insta-matic camera taped to one of the store's walls with a small sign that read

"Camera #1." He believed the faux-security camera would deter shoplifters.

Shoplifting, even without Camera #1 and other sophisticated surveillance equipment, has never been a problem for New Clear Days though.

"We have our preventative techniques," Chris said. "We're not going to let anything just sneak out of here. We have a high-tech metal pipe and a high-tech can of mace to keep that from happening."

Other "objects d'art" have won places on the mantle beside Fred's camera. There is a plastic Godzilla, assorted toys from Burger King's *Toy Story* promotion, autographed pictures of Jimmy Carter and Weird Al, and the store's namesake Vapors' album.

"The Vapors are best known for 'Turning Japanese,' but it is actually a classic album," Dan said, pointing over the counter to the album.

"It is truly a gem of New



Dan Cook and Chris Bickel are the proprietors of Columbia's New Clear Days, "the cheapest in town."

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