

Copia shuttered

24 Nov 2008 by Linda Murphy

Latest update: On 24 Nov, McGuire said in a prepared statement, "The current economic crisis has made it difficult to obtain capital and applied additional pressure to our financial turnaround announced earlier this year. Temporarily suspending Copia's operations will protect the interests of our employees by securing their wages while we negotiate a go-forward plan."

The statement said Copia is restructuring its debt "to allow it to continue to serve its food-and-wine education mission." Its public relations agency in Los Angeles said Copia will release more information after the Thanksgiving holiday.

23 Nov: Without warning or explanation, Copia, the debt-ridden wine, food and arts centre in Napa, closed its doors Friday afternoon and did not re-open for the weekend.

A sign taped to the door informed those arriving for Copia's weekly Friday movie night that the closure was temporary and referred visitors to Copia's web site. A Saturday book signing by New York chef Andrew Carmellini and a concert that night were cancelled. I rang Copia's telephone number throughout the weekend and didn't get a live person to respond.

Just last week (see [Copia - the continuing saga](#)), Copia CEO Garry McGuire said the building, opened in 2001, and its surrounding 12 acres overlooking the Napa River, would be sold by the end of the year to pay down Copia's reported \$78 million debt. He said Copia might lease back part of the building from the new owner, or find a new location in Napa Valley, and that in any case, it would establish a second food and wine centre in tourist-magnet San Francisco, with high hopes for a nationwide chain of such outlets.

But as of 23 Nov, following the abrupt closure of Copia, the home page of [copia.org](#) had no mention of the shuttering. A click on the hours of operation button on the site revealed notice that "COPIA is temporarily closed", and "Please check back soon for additional information." Future calendar listings were marked as "closed", and the web page for Copia's Julia's Kitchen restaurant had been removed.

The ongoing changes in Copia's ideals, focus, programmes, staffing, hours of operation and admission fees, plus the tremendous debt it accumulated even before the US economy tanked, left many folks not surprised that the doors are now locked. For how long is not known, and the question of whether Copia can survive remains unanswered.

Ironically, downtown Napa has been rejuvenated by the recent openings of the Oxbow Public Market, a Westin Verasa hotel/condominium, new restaurants, wine bars and winery tasting rooms, and plans for a Ritz-Carlton hotel. Copia was the anchor for this exciting development on the Napa River, yet it may be the pioneer that took arrows in the back, too far ahead of its time.

In an ironic twist, the Napa Valley Vintners (NVV) released a report on the economic impact of wine to Napa county, valuing it at nearly \$11 billion annually. So while the valley as a whole is prospering, Copia has not benefited from the largesse.

Barbara Insel of Stonebridge Research conducted the economic study through 2006, concluding that while Napa Valley produces only 4% of California's wine grapes, it has nearly 30% of the financial impact of wine in California, and nearly 34% of the economic impact of California wine to the US economy. Heavy stuff.

Her report, compiled before the 2008 economic downturn, shows that direct revenue from wine produced in Napa Valley exceeds \$4.1 billion annually. The wine industry leads in job creation in Napa county, and generates tax revenues for local, state and federal agencies totaling \$4.4 billion. The report takes into account wages at vineyards, cellars, bottling lines and cooperages, and sales at restaurants, retail outlets and by beverage distributors.