

The Kids are Alright
From Rocking Out to Helping Out, Flint Local 432 is more than just music

Brian Stout

Joel Rash paid \$2.50 to go to his first punk rock show. He walked through the door and found his home. Since then, Rash has sought to facilitate a home for area teens, college students, and local music fans. That home is Flint Local 432, an all-ages, alcohol-free, smoke-free, violence-free club in downtown Flint.

Walk into the Local on a weekend night and see many of the fashion statements that scare adults, but none of the trouble they'd expect. Tattoos and piercings are the norm. A rainbow of hair dye dots heads in the crowd. An eraser board announces the night's lineup. The spacious performance area is flanked by chairs and couches on either side, and there are usually a few enthusiastic fans dancing up front. Above the stage is a tribute to Jason Willey, a staple of the downtown Flint music scene and a close friend of Rash's who died in 1997. Willey embodied the Local's positive spirit.

"Nobody pays attention to kids unless they are causing problems," Rash said. "The city is closing recreation centers, schools are closing. Kids really have limited places to go to find positive experiences. The Local is providing a place for kids to be a part of something, to interact with others, and I think they understand how important that is."

Flint Local 432 is a favorite stop for national touring bands. Selling more merchandise is a big draw, as the patrons' money is not going to drinks. And the positive attitudes and open-minded fans make for an appealing stop on any band's tour. Punk rock has always been a staple of the Local's shows, but all types of music, and music fans, are welcome. A hip hop night is in the offing, and metal is featured frequently as well. Maintaining the club's clean image is top priority. Rash acknowledges the risks involved in featuring other genres, but he is open to booking all genres of music.

"If a group of high school students wanted to come down and play classical music, I'd book it," he said.

Rash sees a difference in young people's perceptions of downtown Flint. Their parents may have a negative view of downtown, but the patrons of the Local see it differently. Many are choosing to become active supporters of the city.

"Many teenagers feel good about Flint, which leads to them staying in the area for college, to finding an apartment in Flint, and supporting local businesses. Young people overlook the cosmetic problems of downtown, and people need to catch up with them," Rash said.

The negative perceptions of downtown lead to parents worrying about letting their kids come to the Local, but Rash invites them to come in and investigate. Parents are welcome to come in and

look around, and to stay for the bands. Rash will stack the club's track record against any of the other places for young people to socialize in the area.

"Kids sneak alcohol into movie theaters. Kids don't do that here. There have been violent incidents at the local movie theaters, but not here. I don't blame parents for their concern, but I've always said we're safer than going to a high school football game," Rash said.

The club generates enough money on its own from the cover charge to pay bills, and this is very important in looking for grant money. The club's track record puts it in a good position to seek funding. These are necessary steps to ensure the future of the Local, which has been in question from time to time. The club nearly had to close its doors earlier this fall due to \$3000 in debts. A benefit show organized by patrons and an outpouring of support from bands and over 400 local music fans saved the club.

"I think the kids realized how fragile a place like this is, and they took action to make sure the Local was still here for them," Rash said.

With the Local currently in such a good position, Rash has plans to secure that future. He's looking to take the club to the next level. Becoming classified as a 501 (c) 3 Non-profit Organization is also at the top of Rash's list of priorities. After all, showing up and pitching in at shows is how Rash got his start.

Service-minded music fans can come down on cleaning days, and Mondays are reserved for meetings about other opportunities to help. Rash is also interested in developing a promo crew for the club. The goal is to have a representative in each area high school to promote events. A computer-savvy volunteer is also needed to update the website and to post the Local's shows on area music event listings.

One event that should take shape for the fall is a seminar to inspire more teenage girls to start bands. Rash is hoping to book female musicians and several speakers.

"I'm hoping that the young women down here start aspiring to play music. I want them to go from wanting to date a guy in a band to wanting to start a band," Rash said.

Supporting what Rash calls "a peak time for talent and diversity" in the Flint music scene is secondary. Watching local music fans find the home that Rash found at his first punk rock show has always been what keeps him going.

"There is just a continued succession of amazing things happening every weekend," he said. "The rewards have always come more from the people than the music."