

## Rhino's a place teens can call their own

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The three members of Venus in the Morning aren't entirely sold on their band's name. It's a work in progress.

The same goes for the trio's first original song, "Baby's First Bad Day," and their musical abilities. Jessie Grubb, a senior at Bloomington High School North, is on keyboard, an instrument she has received no formal training in playing.

She's learned the basic chords — enough to practice with her bandmates, Wayne Hastings and Eli Chafin, and experiment until a melody sounds right.

"I think that's how you teach yourself to play," Grubb said.

Hastings, a junior at North, is the band's self-taught guitarist. And Chafin, a freshman at Bloomington High School South, rounds out the group on electric bass. But he also plays drums, ukulele and several other instruments.

"I'm not good at any of them," Chafin said while his new friends laughed. "I get bored easily and just keep wanting to try new instruments."

Venus in the Morning is one of three fledgling bands practicing at Rhino's Youth Center in preparation for a live show April 22. Like most of the activities the United Way agency offers, "Music Fridays" started when a club member told Rhino's staff that they were interested in collaborating with other local youth to start a band.

"I think anyone could be in a band if they really wanted to," Hastings said.

When the teenagers who spend their after-school hours at Rhino's pitch ideas like Music Fridays; a clothing drive to collect clothes for their transgender peers; learning how to screen print; starting a zine with resources for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender nonconforming youth; or recording a podcast; it's Brad Wilhelm's job to turn those ideas into engaging programs.



### Rhino's

Wayne Hastings, Eli Chafin, and Jessie Grubb play in a band at Rhino's. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

“All of these things were ideas of young people themselves,” said Wilhelm, director of Rhino’s Youth Center. “Kids literally have a hand in running everything.”

Before Rhino’s, safe and fun after-school and weekend activities for the youth of Bloomington were sparse, Wilhelm said. Kids caught using spray paint to graffiti property ended up in the prosecutor’s office. Underage youth who played in bands or wanted to listen to live music risked running into police at concerts held in warehouses and garages.

“Especially in a small college town, there isn’t focused programming for them,” Wilhelm said.

Twenty-four years ago this month, the Rhino’s All Ages Club started holding weekly concerts in the Walnut Street space that is now the location of The Bishop music club.

“This is really the only place young performers can play,” Wilhelm said.

High school and college-aged musicians and music fans, who Wilhelm said often didn’t feel they had a place to fit in, now had a safe, alcohol- and tobacco-free venue that would soon expand into offering free programming seven days a week at its current 331 S. Walnut St. location, a few blocks south of the old one.

Now, United Way statistics show that Rhino’s youth have a 100 percent graduation rate.

"I know what we do makes a difference in kids' lives," Wilhelm said. "While they were here, they were a part of something bigger."

A \$1,000 grant from the Bloomington Urban Enterprise Association allowed the nonprofit to purchase some new equipment for the keyboard, drum kits, electric and acoustic guitars and bass that have been donated to Rhino’s over the years.

“It’s a good practice space for someone who might not have that at home,” said Amy Oelsner, Rhino’s co-assistant director and creative writing program director.

Using these instruments, Venus in the Morning members played their first song together — Buddy Holly’s “Take Your Time.” Since they started practicing together in August, the high school students have also learned indie pop singer Frankie Cosmos’ “Birthday Song,” and “Dreamphone” by Peach Kelli Pop, an all-girl punk band.

The songs are as eclectic as the musicians’ personal tastes. Hastings is the Buddy Holly fan, and he also listens to a lot of jazz, country and avant-garde. Grubb’s preference is for punk music, and Chafin can’t narrow his preferences to any specific genres.

“I just wanted to be in a band that sounded like they were having fun,” Chafin said.