

Rock on, little dudes

Academy gives them a chance to be in a band

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As Steve Janke would start tapping on his snare drum, his brother, John, would then begin thrashing his guitar. It wasn't music. It wasn't in unison. In fact, neither of them had any interest in playing together.

Actually, the Janke brothers were in different rooms while playing. Meanwhile their mother had to suffer through this antisocial musical babble.

"I said, 'Why don't you get your friends together and start playing?'" said Vicki Janke, Steve and John's mother. "They tried, but it didn't result in much. Sometimes their friends would actually come over and a few minutes later, I'd see them playing video games or soccer out in front. I just think it was really a maturity issue. They are a little too young to be organized."

So Vicki came up with an idea: Why not a Rock Academy?

"Music school tells you how to play an instrument. We wanted to create something that could bring those musicians together who can't play on their own," said the Downers Grove mother. "I don't think there is a drummer out there who plans on being on a stage by himself. So we thought we should start pairing together kids who want to be in a band and play rock 'n' roll."

For eight weeks, children ages 11-15, play in an hour-long jam session on a Sunday afternoon at the Loyal Order of Moose Lodge, 1030 Warren Avenue in downtown Downers Grove. Musicians at the Rock Academy must have at least one year of formal experience playing either the bass, guitar, drums or be a singer. Each child receives lessons from a private teacher and is combined with other musicians to form their first band.

The camp costs \$160 per child.

The band learns several songs through the eight-week semester and graduates by performing in a concert at the Ballydoyle, Irish Pub, 5157 Main St. in Downers Grove. Band members will take the stage at 3 p.m. Sunday.

"I've been doing it for a while, since my mom runs the business, but I think it's important to play together because it's just hard to get people to follow through," said Steve, 13, a student at Herrick Middle School in Downers Grove. "I've even made some friends and my brother formed a band after meeting some kids at the Rock Academy."

Oftentimes parents are better prepared for children who want to go to soccer camp, join the swim team or play in little league. But finding an avenue for your 11-year-old who wants to make his guitar squeal like Jimi Hendrix may not be as easy.

Which is why a lot of children are now turning to music simulation video games like "Guitar Hero" and "Rock Band."

"Absolutely, I would say the games are helping turn up interest in rock," she said. "It expands their horizon and gives them a good review of rock 'n' roll history. I know a lot of those children want to learn how to play instruments like some of the guys they see in those games. But it's even better if they have a chance to play music for real."

The next camp opens April 6. Visit www.rockacademyonline.com or call 630-853-0709.
