

VIDEO: Rock Academy helps young musicians form bands



By Kate Dougherty

Students of Rock Academy play March 20 at the Downers Grove Moose Lodge.

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Downers Grove Reporter

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Downers Grove, IL -

Downers Grove resident Luke Cesarz had been playing guitar for four years but had not found anyone to jam with.

Now Luke plays with other young performers at the Rock Academy of DuPage, rehearsing a song for eight weeks both in and outside the weekly sessions before getting the chance to showcase his band's skills at a live concert.

"When we found out about this, we thought it would be an awesome opportunity," said Luke's father, John Cesarz. "I think he's really improved a lot. He practices a lot at home, and the guys get together about four or five times in the session and jam together."

Rock Academy, which starts its fifth session Saturday, April 5, has grown from nine to 36 members since starting last summer. Five bands are formed each session by skill, age and musical taste, said instructor Holly Pintozzi, a Downers Grove resident. Participants must be at least 11 and have had a year of formal training before enrolling.

"I'm a drum teacher, and I saw there was a need to get kids together to take it a step further and actually meet other performers and perform instead of going to lessons week after week," Pintozzi said.

Pintozzi teamed up with Downers Grove resident Vicki Janke, who was struggling with how to get her own sons to move beyond playing the guitar and drums by themselves.

"They just were so lost, and when they did try to play with friends, there was no discipline," Janke said.

Now the program has gotten so big the academy, which currently uses the basement of the Moose Lodge, is looking for its own space. Students have been coming back session after session working on songs from Matchbox 20 to Rage Against the Machine and The Clash. Their final concert was at Ballydoyle Irish Pub and Restaurant in downtown Downers Grove. Students also have gotten the chance to try new instruments or sing, and some may soon be working on writing music.

"It's great meeting other people, and playing a live concert was really fun," said Brian Grippando, a sixth-grader at Pierce Downer School. "This kind of brings it together."

Darien resident Vicki Stearns said she is happy her son Benjamin has been making friends through Rock Academy and is excited to start his next session.

"They love getting together on Saturdays," she said. "Performing in front of people is just such a kick for them."



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