

THURSDAY, April 16, 1998 · WEEKEND 3

## Cover Story

### At 242 Main, there's no band too small, no noise too loud

By Melissa Garrido  
Free Press Staff Writer

Brandon Perras' punk-pop band, The Implants, might still be performing in the Essex High School cafeteria if the Burlington club 242 Main didn't exist.

"As a local band, it's hard to find places to play," said 16-year-old Perras, who plays bass. "It's hard to get into (Club) Toast. At Toast, you have to have a tape or recording out.

But "as long as your band can play for half an hour and stay together and sound like a band, you can play at 242," he said.

Hidden in a dark room beneath Memorial Auditorium, 242 Main is a non-alcoholic, non-smoking club. Although the club is for people of all ages, high school and some college students congregate at the urban lounge to catch live music.

Teens in baggy clothes from as far away as St. Albans pack the tennis court-sized club. Many come to see their friends play at a "real" club — with a microphone, a public address system, a sound board and amplifiers. The club is also a haven for young touring bands from distant states like Wisconsin and New Jersey. And on occasion, a successful local band like Zola Turn will return to its old stomping grounds for an evening show.

"It's an escape," said Joe Blodgett, a 16-year-old Essex High School student. "It's not much like real life. You don't have to deal with anything.

"And no one here causes any problems," he said.

Perras' 9-month-old group rehearses after school about eight hours a week (in the drummer's living room) to prepare for gigs at 242 Main. On a Wednesday or Friday evening, The Implants might lure two dozen teens and take home about \$50.

But money isn't the big attraction. The band members play because they dig music.

"Being on stage feels cool," Perras said. "It feels like you are a celebrity or something."

Concerts often start about dinnertime and end by 11 p.m., in accordance with Burlington's noise ordinance. Although the bands range from groove rock to industrial, the most popular acts play variations of punk. Admis-



ROB SWANSON, Free Press

If your parents hate it, they're doing their job: David Wuttke, Jen Mindell, Buck Shepard and Rob Toof are part of the staff at 242 Main.

## Where the wild things are

sion is rarely more than \$5: The band receives an 80 percent cut; 20 percent goes back to Memorial Auditorium. In addition to money from the door, Burlington City Arts (which oversees 242 Main) allots the club \$3,000 a year to replace or upgrade equipment or for advertising.

Saturday night's industrial-rock bands — Chainsaws & Children, Terretion and Adrenal Recursion — drew a colorful flock of teens clad in mainly black. At 7 p.m., high schoolers huddled around the basement entrance, awkwardly puffing on Marlboro Lights waiting for the two-min-

utes-'til-showtime cue. Inside, couples lounged on rickety couches with their arms around shoulders and waists. A couple of girls sat on stools necking while teens argued about which hardcore band was better, Chainsaws & Children or Marilyn Manson.

"My favorite part is the atmosphere," said Hannah Hafter, who calls herself "the Chelsea Clinton of South Burlington." She didn't look the part: The 15-year-old South Burlington High School student wore black vinyl pants and a spiked collar. "The people and the music blend together so

nicely." David Wuttke, 22, and several friends run the club — booking shows, sweeping the floor and collecting admission. The scruffy bunch meets Wednesday nights at a Burlington house to discuss the ins and outs of the club.

For eight years, different crews of volunteers have taken over the club for about eight months at a time. The current group has been involved with 242 Main since October, and almost immediately received heat from clubgoers.

In late fall, the group faced a boycott when music fans disapproved of the volunteers' decision not to book bands that used racial, sexual or homophobic lyrics. Clubgoers feared the censorship had gone too far and protested.

"The city has a code of acceptable behavior," said Doreen Kraft, director of Burlington City Arts. "It is supposed to be an all-ages club, and it has to meet the needs of its constituents. If there is an obscenity issue, it goes to the city attorney's office.

"We also have a responsibility to respect the freedom of the people going to the event to not be insulted or affected by the lyrics," she said.

Last year's incident was ironed out and never made it to the attorney's office, Kraft said. The organizers have adapted to the tastes of their audiences.

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Brandon Perras, The Implants

"The space is 100 percent neutral," said Jen Mindell, a 19-year-old volunteer from Burlington. "As a whole, the place does not have a political agenda. A lot of people think the place is too PC, and that we don't book bands that we don't like — and that is definitely not true."

Although the bands are a major draw, the teens show up at the club to hang out with friends and escape their parents. Few return after college to check out high school bands. They might head down the street to see national acts at Burlington night clubs that serve alcohol and permit smoking like Club Toast or Club Metro-nome.

"I can't imagine when I'm 40 looking like this and coming to these shows," Hafter said. Although "I don't consider it a stage."



Battered, beloved: Part of 242 Main's PA system.

### Coming up

- Here's what's ahead at 242 Main:
- **Aestesian Orchestra** (groove rock): 8 p.m. April 17. \$3.
- **Braid** (from Illinois), **Compound Red** (Wisconsin): 6 p.m. April 22. \$3.
- **Old Skool Hip Hop Dance Party**: 8 p.m. April 23. ABC benefit. \$5.
- **Burlington Indie Rock Fest**: Part of the fourth Burlingtonitis extravaganza: The Wicked Farley's, Syrup USA, Lock Groove, Sarge (Day 1), 8 p.m. April 24. \$5.
- **Call for show updates:** 862-2244.