

# Teens have place to call their own

By Molly Walsh  
Free Press Staff Writer

Once upon a time, Burlington teen-agers had no place to hang out. But once upon a time ain't no more.

Now they have a place to exchange ideas, eat ice cream after school, hear or perform live music, take classes and produce their own television show. That place is 242 Main, which opened in April 1986.

"Kids have a lot to say during their high school years," said Kathy Lawrence, arts coordinator for The Mayor's Youth Office, which runs the center.

The walls at 242 Main are a form of teen expression. They are covered with detailed murals and painted-on lyrics to Beatles' songs, anti-war slogans and poetry. This ranges from e.e. cummings: "no one, not even the rain has such small hands" to anonymous rhymes like "I need to powder my nose ... your love is like a rose."

One afternoon this week, 242 Main was buzzing with all sorts of activity. On the steps students gathered for a voice class taught by Jody Albright. Inside, young musicians learned what the lineup will be for "The Battle of Bands" Oct. 21, an annual contest that drew a crowd of 1,000 to Memorial Auditorium last year. Bands and the order in which they will battle it out this year: Rock Candy; The Toll; Coda; Out Of The

Blue; Razor's Edge; The Rage.

Other teens discussed a Halloween skateboard contest that will take place on the Church Street Marketplace, and others played air hockey or ate Winooski Chip Mill cookies.

Holly Morris, 13, thinks the teen center is a good place to be. "The people are real friendly, they are easy to talk to," Morris said. Jessica Hoehn of Burlington is taking a voice class and helps produce the teen cable television show, "242 Main Presents." "We learn to use a video. We go out and interview people," the 12-year old said.

Nareth Leang, 15, comes to the teen center every day after school. She works behind the counter serving ice cream, pizza and bagels, and sneaks in a round of Time Fantasy (a pinball spin-off) when she gets a chance. As jobs go, it's not too bad. "I like it," she said. "I have a lot of friends who come in and talk to me."

242 Main is known as a happening place for music — especially the kind that is described as speed, thrash or heavy metal. Kids with mohawks and Twisted Sister T-shirts wander in and out, as do members of local bands. It is one of the few places in Burlington where people under age can hear live rock music free or at low cost. Many bands enjoy the attentive, straight-edge (substance-free) audience.

Jazz and acoustic groups also

perform at 242 Main, but turnout is much greater for heavy-metal groups like the San Francisco-based Death Angel, which performed at the teen center recently. At 242 Main Friday for an 8 p.m. show: Frantic Stance with special guest Stone Killer.

"While we're not only here for them, that whole group of kids seem drawn to the place," Lawrence said. Whether the kids come for a sketch class or a heavy metal concert, they adhere to rules against drugs or alcohol at the teen center. "They are respectful," Lawrence said.

"If people want to drink, they'll go somewhere else," said

Seth Feeley, 16, an avid skateboarder who comes to the center a few times a week.

Best of all, the teen center is place for young people to brainstorm. "What's successful about the place is that kids come in here with an idea, and we are here to help them organize it, but they do the work. We set up programs that come in response to what the kids want," Lawrence said.

*242 Main is in the basement of Memorial Auditorium on College Street. It is open Monday through Friday, 2:30-5 p.m., and Friday and Saturday evenings from 7:30-11:30.*

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