

Crawl speeds up

„ The First Friday music event has expanded to more acts and more venues.

BY STEPHANIE BARNARD

Eagle correspondent

Wichita's new downtown music crawl has seen steady growth since its debut in April.

Tonight's First Friday event will feature 24 artists at 20 venues, up from 13 artists at 12 venues in April, said Jason Dilts, development director of ROK ICT, the event's organizer.

"The biggest spike was between April and May — we almost doubled the number of venues," Dilts said.

Dilts said any venue in town can host a band on First Friday and use the ROK ICT Web site to promote the show, but the official acts are only those in the downtown area, so that participants can walk or take the trolley between shows.

"We didn't want to get it too big too fast," he said.

Attendance numbers are hard to gauge, Dilts said, but he estimated that 2,000 to 3,000 people have shown up to hear the music each month.

"The event has already exceeded what we thought was possible originally," said ROK ICT founder Jared Brickman.

Part of the First Friday program is that ROK ICT handles the booking for shows. Most venues are still having the organization do that, Dilts said, though some are now booking artists on their own.

"We try to be mindful of what appeal an artist will have related to what kind of clientele a venue has," he said.

Brickman said he's seen venues get more comfortable with booking regional and national acts.

The original venues have continued to participate in First Friday, with many reporting increased revenue and more support of live music. Dilts and Brickman cited Rock Island Live and Club Indigo, respectively, as examples.

"That's a victory for us," Brickman said.

The event is attracting regional attention; this month's lineup features acts from California, Arkansas and Missouri, as well as local bands. Dilts said ROK ICT is selecting a mix of artists from inside and outside Wichita.

"We want to showcase the Wichita music scene, but at the same time we want to put Wichita on people's radar nationally," he said.

Ryan Heinlein, composer and trombonist for jazz group The Project H, moved from his native Wichita to Kansas City a year ago. He said Kansas City does a better job of supporting its local musicians, but he digital.olivesoftware.com/.../getFiles.as...

still wants to play in his hometown.

"I'm proud to be a part of (the Wichita) scene," he said. "There are some really good bands, but there could be more support. ROK ICT is doing an amazing thing . . . (giving) the Wichita scene a sense of pride."

Tonight, Dilts hopes Wichita-area residents with families visiting for the holiday weekend will bring them downtown to see what First Friday has to offer.

"The stereotype of 'there's nothing to do in Wichita' is really starting to fade," he said.

Brickman said he hopes the event will continue to expand its reach, but his organization can't do it alone.

"Continued support from the community and businesses is extremely important to continue the momentum," he said. "This is not something we've done by ourselves."



Courtesy photo

Wichita musician Nikki Moddelmog will perform tonight at Loft 150 as part of this month's First Friday music crawl.



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Courtesy photo

The band Surphace will play tonight at Club Indigo.

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