

Live from Old Town

„ Rock Island Live, a new setting within Emerson Biggins, offers original music.

BY STEPHANIE BARNARD

Eagle correspondent

Rock Island Live, a bar and music venue that opened in Old Town last month, turned out to be a single solution to two problems facing general manager Jenn Ray.

The first was a need to make better use of the space at Emerson Biggin's, which she also manages.

The second was her desire to support live, original music.

“There are too many venues with just cover bands,” Ray said. “There seems to be a need for a spot like this in Old Town.”

Rock Island Live, 101 N. Rock Island, was created when an area in the back of Emerson Biggin's was converted into a separate bar with a stage as a focal point.

“We want to generate a really creative, laid-back, easy vibe,” Ray said.

Behind the stage, a garage door opens to reveal a small outdoor seating area, increasing the audience size and creating more room for bands to play. Small barheight tables and chairs surround the stage.

The decor is mostly red and black, with large photos of musicians and reprints of old concert posters lining the walls. The venue has its own sound and lighting systems.

Rock Island Live is open Wednesday through Sunday nights, and “you can bet on live entertainment every night,” Ray said. A local DJ is also slated for a weekly gig.

The venue participated in the First Friday music crawl, just two days after its grand opening.

“It was awesome,” Ray said. “We had a great time.”

Rock Island Live hopes to tap into what Ray calls a “community of local artists who are willing to support this.”

“They're open and they're ready,” said Kevin Wildt, drummer for indie-rock band polarOPPOSITEbear, one of the first acts to play at Rock Island Live. “They told us we could come back whenever we wanted. That kind of enthusiasm is really what is needed (in Wichita).”

As far as musical genre is concerned, if it's “original, creative and fresh,” it's a good fit, said Ray, who finds bands through MySpace.com and by working with agents.

“This has given me exposure to a lot of bands I didn't know existed,” she said.





Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle

Jenn Ray is the general manager of the new Rock Island Live, which hopes to offer a strong lineup of local bands playing original music.

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