

Big Moment No. 1: SWFL bands look for big exposure in battle for recording prize

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Seventeen local bands will be slinging their axes in the biggest band battle to hit Southwest Florida.

The Homegrown 2010 Music Fest is set for Saturday at Germain Arena in Estero. The event was organized by the Rev. Roy Terry, pastor of the Cornerstone United Methodist Church in Naples, and Sammy Wallace, vice-president of event programming at Germain Arena.

Terry, who also organizes the annual Naples Strawberry Festival and Indie Fest, has been involved in local music in Southwest Florida for years, often having bands play at the church.

“Southwest Florida isn’t known for being one of the concert hot spots, and yet we have some of the best indie bands around, if not some of the best bands in the state,” Terry said.

Terry met Wallace more than a year ago when he began planning a benefit fund raiser for breast cancer research. The event did not come together but the two kept in touch. Terry’s involvement in the local music scene matched Wallace’s interests in hosting a local event and Homegrown was born.

“The idea of being able to play on the Germain Arena stage in a big production and having a nice big crowd, it’s great exposure for (the bands) and a great experience,” Wallace said.

Germain Arena is also part of the appeal for the audience.

“The name Germain Arena is bringing a lot of people into this show that normally wouldn’t go catch you at a smaller place,” said Colby Peters, drummer for competing band Phoenix Falling. The hope is that the event will snowball into people coming out to smaller venues, he said.

Peters’ band’s first show was at an event Terry organized at Cornerstone United Methodist Church.

“He really wants to help local bands. He doesn’t have to throw these events, but he does it because he really likes it,” Peters said.

Terry planned for 15 bands, but after the influx of applications he bumped that number to 17. All of the bands had to be unsigned, play original music and have some previous experience.

To secure a spot, bands needed to sell 100 tickets. The bands got to pick a time slot once their tickets were sold.

However, a bit of luck helped pull one band into the event.

Homegrown was the impetus for longtime drummer Rick Margerison to form Love in War, the event's opening band. Margerison pulled together friends in the industry and got to work when another band backed out. They've been practicing overtime while selling the last of their tickets.

"It's not about winning, it's about having a good time and a good experience," Margerison said.

The organizers hope this will be the first of many years of the event, and so do the bands.

"This speaks volumes to how much people really want something in this town. People really want to buy into the arts in this town," said Slim Gillian, guitarist for Fellowbliss, who will be competing at the event.

Germain Arena won't be the biggest venue Fellowbliss has played, but it will be the biggest in the Southwest area. Gillian, who has been a full-time musician for 10 years described the event as "brilliant."

"This is the first time I've seen a band battle that can really judge a band's ability to market themselves and draw a crowd, on top of being able to put on a good show," he said.

The first place band will win \$2,500 and 10 hours of studio time with JML Recording Studio, based in Fort Myers; second place will win \$1,000 and third place will win \$500.

TJ Kelly has been playing with his band, the TJ Kelly Band, for five years. Born and raised in Fort Myers, the musician called the event a "jump start" for the music scene in Southwest Florida.

"Everything here is cover bands. Everything is ruled by bands playing radio music," he said. "It's tough to find venues that want people playing original music. I think it's great that they're doing it."

Five judges will select the winners as Terry's band, Holy Moly Band, plays. The judges will award points for playing ability, composition, stage presence, crowd participation and creative performance. Locals can also sponsor the event, with \$250 buying a table in the lobby and \$2,000 for a table and a banner on the stage.

The first band plays at 2 p.m. and the event will go until midnight. Germain Arena has waived the parking fee for the day and tickets are \$10. Concertgoers can purchase tickets at the door.



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