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Column:Meinert Kendra

IQ's good vibes draw crowds
Staff

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Every bar needs a gimmick - sports memorabilia plastered on the walls, '70s music on the stereo, a fancy rooftop stage or a high-end dance floor.

But at 715 S. Broadway, the come-on is the good vibe.

Since opening IQ's in October 1998, Bill and Sandi Hickey have quietly and patiently transformed a former biker bar into a meeting place that echoes the reason they named it as they did.

"It's catchy and a little quirky," Bill Hickey said of the IQ's name.

The same can be said of the atmosphere.

Tucked in an 1880 building that has housed a bar since 1908, IQ's is easy to miss. It's farther down Broadway than the stretch of recent redevelopment, and it's no raving beauty from the outside.

But inside, it's a night spot all about the little touches (that massive, wooden back bar aside).

Like the artwork - some from local artists, some from the antique store next door - that hangs on the walls where you'd expect to find neon beer signs.

Or that John Coltrane, The Chieftans, Muddy Waters, Phish, Miles Davis, Rage Against the Machine and bootleg Bob Dylan make up one of the most eclectic jukeboxes in the city.

Or that there are only four items on the menu but they run the gamut from a "vegetarian-style bean and cheese burrito" to a "big beefy cheeseburger."

Or that something as simple as candles and incense set the mood.

Or that plants swiped from the Hickeys' home decorate a modest outdoor beer garden.

Or the way the place shakes when a locomotive comes through.

Or that Guinness is on tap.

Or...

"We were trying to do something different," said Hickey, a musician who gave up 10 years in sales for his first bar venture. "We're constantly trying to come up with something new."

The appeal for many patrons - most in their 20s with an affection for non-mainstream music and all things laid back - is the live music, mostly from acts unique to IQ's.

There are open jams on Sundays, jazz on Mondays and non-traditional blues from Wooden Toe on Tuesdays. On Thursdays, Hickey fronts house band Roadhouse Scholars and plays the piano he rescued from the curb outside a church years ago.

Weekend music often includes bands with appeal to Phish, Dylan and Grateful Dead fans.

"You won't hear music like this anywhere in Green Bay. I can assure you that," Hickey said. "A lot of the bands are start-ups who couldn't find anywhere else to play."

Hickey gave them a chance. Listeners responded.

"Performers like to play here, because the audience is so receptive," he said.

Wooden Toe, a crowd favorite, hadn't really played anywhere before IQ's, Hickey said, and some of the jazz musicians started out playing for drinks.

The Hickeys originally thought music would be a secondary focus, but it has become a primary draw. Even the monthly poetry night that bombed the first time is catching on.

"You don't just happen to come in here. You hear about us somewhere," Hickey said. "There are people who have been coming in since we opened, and for a long time, they were alone. We've been pretty fortunate. We've had the right people come in and it has all fit together."

As word on IQ's gets out, it's good news for the Hickeys and club crawlers looking for more diversity out there. It's bittersweet, however, for those patrons who discovered IQ's early on and were hoping to keep the secret all to themselves.

Summer in the Park is a great seasonal event, but the series of free lunch-time concerts downtown has become as stale as that sandwich your co-worker has had in the lunchroom fridge since May.

Of the 13 acts playing this year - and, nothing against those acts - six of them played last year. Of the seven who are not repeats, five are regulars at area bars and fests.

If the Hanson concert June 19 at Bay Beach Amusement Park proved anything, it's that kids are ones who have time to burn on a weekday afternoon it's not downtown business people who are often too busy to even take a lunch. Throw the kids a bone or two by including a young pop/rock act. Market it specifically to them and they just might come downtown, stop in at Port Plaza Mall, fill up with gas, get something to eat, etc.

Of course, overexposure is all relative. A quick tally shows Pat McCurdy playing 23 gigs on three stages in 11 days at Summerfest.

Gallagher's Off Broadway, 163 N. Pearl St., is bringing back its Modern Rock Challenge at 6 p.m. Sundays. The all-ages event, which drew an average of 300 kids each week last year, features two teen bands duking it out for the right to open for a national act (to be announced) later in the summer.

The first challenge is Sunday cover is \$5 and includes free soda and popcorn. Bands interested in getting a piece of the action should call (920) 435-4992.

Also, look for Bay City Swing playing the Gallagher's roof from 7:30 to 10 p.m. July 11, 25 and Aug. 8 as part of the free "Swing in the Sky" summer series.

Odds and ends:

The Packers Experience returns July 19-Aug. 20 at ShopKo Hall. Admission to the football-themed, interactive event will be \$7.50 ages 12 and older and \$5 ages 3-11 and 55 and older.

Best band names from the big bunch of acts playing Summerfest: The Thousandaires, Bad Dogs on Couches, Slow Motion Walter and EIEIO.

MORE/MORE2go editor Kendra Meinert writes about stuff happening on the local music and nightlife scenes. If you know of something, call her at (920) 431-8347 or e-mail more@greenbaypressgazette.com

Ahead at IQ's

* Roadhouse Scholars, blues, 9:30 p.m. today.

* PhonaMystic, psychedelic blues for Phish fans, 9 p.m. Friday \$3 cover.

* Habanero Jazz Band, outside in the beer garden, 4-7 p.m. Saturday. Patrons can bring their own steaks, burgers and brats to grill.

* Jazz and blues jam, Sunday.

* Open poetry night, 7:30 p.m. Monday.

* Wooden Toe, original blues/Grateful Dead and Bob Dylan covers, 9 p.m. Tuesday.

* Open stage for songwriters, 9 p.m. Wednesday.

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