

We Rock music school brings its heart downtown

Community focus part of philosophy

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

The We Rock school of music has found a new home in the heart of Stouffville.

And it's bringing its community-oriented focus along with a renewed sense of vigour.

The school didn't have a permanent home after moving from EastRidge Church on 10th Line.

For a time the Stouffville Lions Club let We Rock to work out of Latham Hall. The school has also taught guitar lessons in the Lebovic Leisure Centre.

But then representatives from the PACE Credit Union Ltd. at 6245 Main St. decided they liked the school's philosophy and made the second floor of the building available to the school's operator, Stouffville resident Jim McMillan.

We Rock still teaches drums, guitar and voice. It has a recording studio and offers coaching programs. It plans to branch out into providing music therapy.

The school will continue to focus on helping the community, co-owner Kathi Wood said.

That includes having students from We Rock perform at community events and eventually give music lessons to children who couldn't otherwise afford them.

One of its students, 28-year-

old Robert Gagnon, who has cerebral palsy, has been taking drum lessons from Paul Greco for two years, first at the Stouffville Pentecostal Church and now at We Rock.

Two years ago, Mr. Gagnon's muscles were so contracted he held his hands up in front of his chest most of the time. Now, with the drum exercises he's been doing, he can move freely.

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Mr. Greco has been a musician for 35 years and studied at the Ontario College of Percussion.

There is "nothing fast track" about his teaching method, he says.

"It is a very thorough process that is rooted in military style and we branch out from there."

Mr. Gagnon, who receives his Master of Theology degree in May, has improved his co-ordination so much that he now qualifies for drivers education.

"It is really remarkable what changes have happened," the Stouffville resident said, adding playing the drums has been a

life-long goal.

He's not sure what he'll do after graduating, saying only, "I'm keeping my options open".

Mr. Greco has worked with other students, who have conditions such as attention deficit disorder.

After outlining the results he's achieved in working with Mr. Gagnon, Mr. Greco was invited to teach music therapy at the Bloorview MacMillan Children's Hospital in Toronto.

The school's youngest drum student is eight-year-old Bethany Mazzeo, whom Mr. Greco described as "Bam Bam Bethany".

"We fit the teaching style to the needs of the students and make it enjoyable," Mr. McMillan said.

Eleven-year-old Stephen Downey has been learning the drums since November at We Rock. He recently received an "A" in drum class at his school, his mother Linda said.

Stouffville residents have a chance to see one of the We Rock voice students, Brittany Ewart, who is in Grade 8, at the Youth Week talent show in May.

While Ms Ewart continues with classical voice lessons, she came to We Rock to hone the pop songs she likes singing at home.

Unlike her classical lessons, We Rock is "really fun and laid back," she said. "It's a way different style."

She's performed in the Newmarket Lions Festival, in school talent shows and has sung the national anthem at a Stouffville Spirit hockey game.

For the talent show, she's planning to perform songs by Evanescence and American Idol winner Kelly Clarkson.

Coming in for his weekly guitar lesson is the highlight of

Patrick Trainor's week.

"He is very serious about taking the guitar and wants to be a musician," his mom, Nancy, said.

The school provides students with "their own space to be creative," Mr. McMillan said.

Reach We Rock at 905-640-4790.

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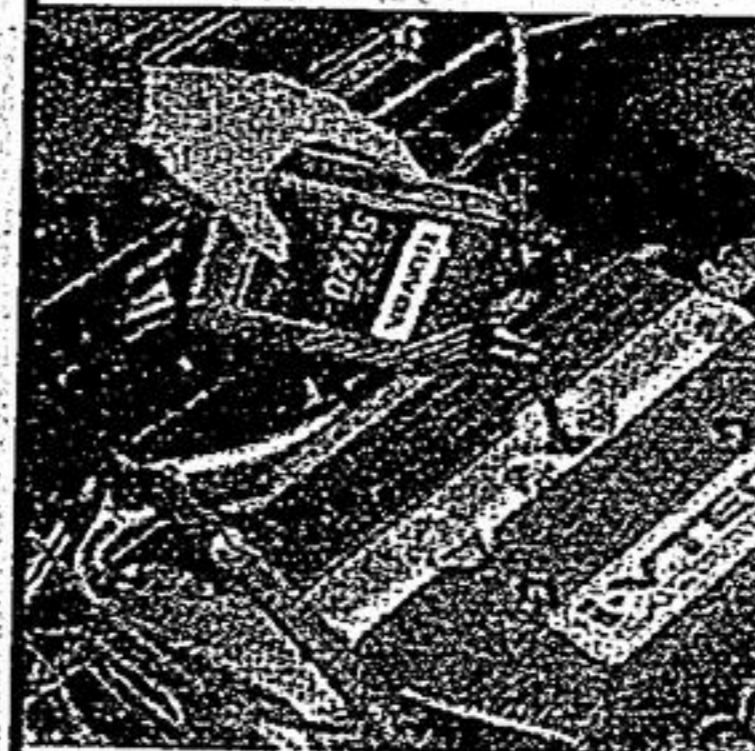
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