

Doing their Civic duty

By Chris Bergeron/DAILY NEWS STAFF
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FRAMINGHAM -

Rolling down Rte. 95 in a van, band members from Between the Trees are psyched to be bringing their indie-pop music to new fans during their East Coast tour.

Jeremy Butler, the group's 19-year-old bassist, said starting a band, cutting a successful album and trying to crash the big time "is every kid's dream."

"We're trying to make fresh music and build a buzz," he said between shows. "When we play, we just want to make sure the excitement is there."

Newly signed by Universal Motown Records, the band left its Orlando, Fla., home to spend three months playing gigs in hot spots like the Knitting Factory in New York City, the 1,500-seat Amphitheater in Fayetteville, Ga., and the Framingham Civic League. The Civic League! The Filmore of Concord Street?

It just might happen thanks to a partnership between new Executive Director Ellen Sturgis and two Natick musicians who started their own concert promotion company to bring good bands to places like the Civic League.

Just a month after coming aboard in June, Sturgis made a deal with Mike Wodeyla and Von Nelson, who started Allen Adrian Events LLC in 2003 and spent four years establishing themselves as professionals and take good care of their clients. Sturgis said she has hopes to host at least one concert a week in the Civic League's 350-person capacity auditorium.

"The Civic League has a lot of space that's fundamentally underused. The critical thing is we need more activities and good entertainment for young adults," she said. "Mike and Von called this summer and I liked their goal of bringing good acts for young adults. It's been a good match, a productive partnership."

Since August, they've brought L.A. band Sugar Cult, which once opened for Green Day; Ataris, which has already cut five albums; and now Between The Trees, a band that has been compared to Jimmy Eat World.

If you grew up listening to Bing Crosby or even Jefferson Airplane, those names might sound like new cereal brands or clues in a demented crossword puzzle. But they are what your kids are listening to on their iPods when ignoring you.

Sturgis asked Wodeyla and Nelson to tell bands to avoid profanity or drug references that would trouble parents. Private security is present at Civic League shows. "I want to have bands parents aren't embarrassed to send their kids to," she said. Wodeyla said their company "provides quality entertainment and a safe fun environment for the under-21 crowd."

They first discovered the Civic League and its auditorium had been spruced up when scenes for the Disney movie ``Game Plan," starring Dwayne ``The Rock" Johnson, were filmed there.

These days, Wodeyla and Nelson have been bringing ``new acts just starting to hit smaller clubs" who will appeal to students from Framingham High and Framingham State College. Although much contemporary music defies categorization, they're looking for ``a broad range" of pop-rock, indie, punk and emo acts while keeping ticket prices around \$10.

Since young groups often have limited repertoires, they generally book five acts per show, including two headliners and three new bands.

Both Wodeyla and Nelson are musicians who played in local bands. Wodeyla played guitar for Sore Loser and Nelson was a percussionist in Skyline. They met when Nelson recorded Wodeyla in his private studio. Each has his own business specialty. For 30 years, Nelson has provided sound for musicians across the United States and England, and Wodeyla has a background in booking. Both are Natick High School grads, Nelson with the Class of 1973 and Wodeyla with the Class of 2000.

Sharing an interest in music and sensing business opportunities, they started organizing high school concerts and have developed new venues in Natick and Worcester. Since forming Allen Adrian, Wodeyla and Nelson started a Web site, www.aaeconcerts.com, to advertise concerts, which receives about 500 hits daily. They also use the traditional method of posting fliers and are reaching out to small college radio stations.

Wodeyla estimated they've helped organize between 150 and 200 concerts since starting four years ago. Through its alliance with PureVolume.com, an informational and entertainment Web site, Allen Adrien garners contacts with up-and-coming bands. Nelson believes the key to success has been earning a reputation for professionalism by providing bands with logistical and technical support.

``We're straight with bands. Everything is organized. We've got a good sound system and sound man to help. We get them a place to set up their merchandise. And at the end of the night, the check is always there for them," he said. For Butler, the Civic League show gives Between The Trees a chance to ``take it to the next level" after their first album, ``The Story and the Song," sold 13,000 copies and attracted a major label's attention.

Like his four bandmates, the inside of his lip is tattooed with the Hebrew work ``kall," or ``brother."

After finishing a show in the Vibe Lounge in Rockville Centre, N.Y., they'll drive to Framingham. After the Civic League show, it's off to the Trackside Teen Center in Wilton, Conn. They won't get home until just before Christmas.

Butler said Between the Trees' music ``mixes their different backgrounds and influences'' to give a ``definitely energetic'' performance.

``We definitely get the crowd going,'' he said. ``We want to make sure they're as loud as we are and it's fun for everybody.''

THE ESSENTIALS:

Concerts take place tonight and tomorrow at the Framingham Civic League, 214 Concord St., Framingham.

Doors open at 6:15 p.m. and the show starts at 6:45. Tickets for all ages are \$10 and are available at the door or at www.ticketweb.com.

Tonight: Between The Trees, Automatic Loveletter, Sing It Loud, Leah Stargazing and Knights of the Big Table.

Tomorrow: American Diary, Say When, The Bay State, Once More and 12 String.

Find out more:

Allen Adrian Events: www.aaeconcerts.com.

Framingham Civic League: www.civicleague.net.