

RME prepares to launch Redstone

By Jonathan Turner,

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River Music Experience's new live-music venue, the Redstone Room, will open April 1 with Devin Hansen, formerly of the Rocket Theatre in Rock Island, as venue manager.

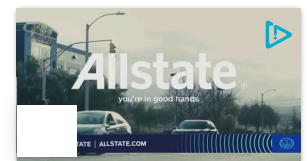
The second-floor space, formerly occupied by the River Wall video exhibit, will feature state-of-the-art sound and lighting systems, and eventually will link to the facility's planned recording studio and video-editing suite in the basement.

"The Redstone Room is a dream come true for the RME," said Lon Bozarth, president and CEO. "Plans to create a world-class live-music venue have been in place since the original concept plans. Together with our proposed Music Incubator educational center, the RME will become a showcase for the creation and performance of American music."

The 8,000-square-foot second-floor space had "only been utilized by a few people each day," Mr. Bozarth said, adding that River Wall videos are available for viewing at kiosks on the floor, and eventually will be put on the RME Web site.

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Original plans to put the live-music venue in the basement were much more expensive than renovating the upstairs, he said.

The Redstone Room will accommodate 250 people for events, complete with bar and food service by Centro. It will operate Tuesday through Sunday, until midnight weeknights and 2 a.m. weekends. A grand opening is planned for April 15-16.

Mr. Bozarth plans to feature nationally known acts once a week, and local and regional musicians the rest of the time.

"It's going to be a very musician-friendly space," he said. "Bands are going to love it. The sound and lighting systems are going to be spectacular. There have been some very great advances in audio technology recently.

"The RME is not only serving its mission to live music, but we believe we're serving our mission to the community," Mr. Bozarth said. "I hope to encourage others to invest in live music. People need choices."

He said the live-music venue is part of rejuvenating downtown Davenport. "Part of our mission is to enhance the Quad-Cities as a place to live, and to attract people to come here to live."

The second floor will have eight large video screens, primarily in the Redstone Room, to air concerts as they occur and play past events during the day, as well as DVDs and, potentially, film festivals. Mr. Bozarth said one screen will face 2nd Street at Mojo's, on the ground floor.

"The screens give us a lot of flexibility to not just have live music all the time," he said.

Most of the concerts will be priced at \$10 to \$20, he said.

RME has hosted 200 live music dates since it opened in June 2004. That includes free music at Mojo's and the RME courtyard. Except for open-mic nights, all RME acts are paid.

Another reason to open the Redstone Room is to raise funds for RME, Mr. Bozarth said. "We are looking forward to reducing our dependence on outside funding. This is one way we can do that. We're completely funded by private sources. We've not used any public funds since the building opened."

Mr. Bozarth declined to reveal the RME's primary funding sources or corporate sponsors, nor did he divulge projected costs for the renovation work.

The RME currently has 700 individual and family memberships and 18 corporate members, he said. The RME will reconfigure what benefits are included with membership, given the programming and service changes taking place. For example, use of the practice rooms and recording studio in the Music Incubator may be free to members.

The 12,000-square-foot Music Incubator will be an outlet for practice, performance and production, and is expected to be used by musicians, music-industry professionals, school groups and area colleges. The classrooms, practice rooms, recording studio and small stage should be ready by late summer, Mr. Bozarth said.

Devin Hansen, who closed his Rocket Theater after last Saturday's RME concert featuring Buckwheat Zydeco, will become venue manager for the Redstone Room. He will coordinate all operations and talent booking.

"When I found out his business was going to close, he was a very natural person to invite to help this new venture," Mr. Bozarth said. "The Rocket going out of business was a knife in the heart of the community. That's the kind of thing we need here."

Mr. Hansen said he's "very excited about moving to another venue that has the same philosophy" he has. The Rocket often hosted live music, including other RME events.

"I think a venue like (the Redstone) will be beneficial in helping retain young people in the community," he said. "That's a big priority with everybody."

RME will continue to use K-Square Ltd. of St. Louis to book national touring acts and RME's annual River Roots Live Festival, Sept. 22-23 this year.

Other changes in RME staff include appointment of Rene Hipple, former development director at the Scott County YMCA, as director of development. Tom Swanson, front man for the local band Jim the Mule, is the new operations manager.

Kim Dugger, receptionist, has expanded her duties to become coordinator of events, such as wedding receptions, banquets and corporate functions.

Ellis Kell, formerly director of music, programming and operations, has become director of marketing and promotions.