


Youngstown's regional culture magazine for loving life and living

 [the yo* magazine]

***the survival issue, spring 2009**

**VexFest sends
shockwaves
through city***

Local artist draws
on Youngstown
experience*

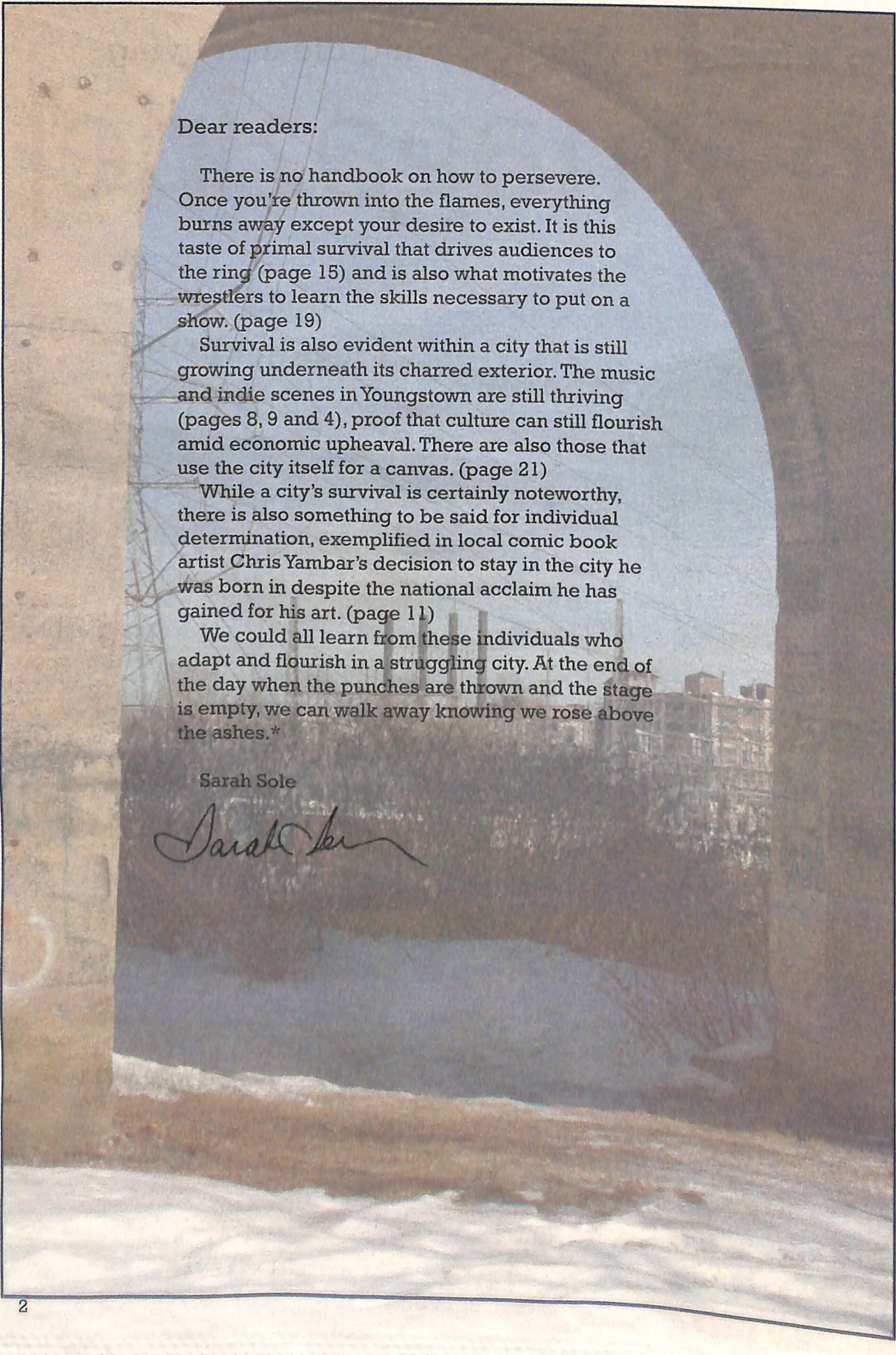
**Urban
artwork***



**KINGS
OF THE RING**

**Local wrestlers fight to survive
inside the ropes**





Dear readers:

There is no handbook on how to persevere. Once you're thrown into the flames, everything burns away except your desire to exist. It is this taste of primal survival that drives audiences to the ring (page 15) and is also what motivates the wrestlers to learn the skills necessary to put on a show. (page 19)

Survival is also evident within a city that is still growing underneath its charred exterior. The music and indie scenes in Youngstown are still thriving (pages 8, 9 and 4), proof that culture can still flourish amid economic upheaval. There are also those that use the city itself for a canvas. (page 21)

While a city's survival is certainly noteworthy, there is also something to be said for individual determination, exemplified in local comic book artist Chris Yambar's decision to stay in the city he was born in despite the national acclaim he has gained for his art. (page 11)

We could all learn from these individuals who adapt and flourish in a struggling city. At the end of the day when the punches are thrown and the stage is empty, we can walk away knowing we rose above the ashes.*

Sarah Sole



Editor
Sarah Sole
ssole@theyomag.com

Writers
Michael Bury
Brian Cetina
Doug Dierkes
Sam Marhulik
Lamar Salter
Melissa Mary Smith
Sarah Sole
Josh Stipanovich

Photography
Michael Bury
Brian Cetina
Leonard Glenn Crist
Doug Dierkes
Lamar Salter
Josh Stipanovich

Copy Editor
Chelsea Pflugh

Designers
Brian Cetina
Adam Rogers
Sarah Sole

contact us

e-mail:
editor@theyomag.com

phone: 330 941-1991
advertising: 330 941-1990
<http://www.theyomag.com>

The Yo' Magazine started in 2007 after students at Youngstown State University asked journalism faculty to help them obtain more experience writing and publishing magazine-style stories. Professor Tim Francisco taught the first magazine writing class, which provided content for an early issue.

YSU alumna and founding editor Cristina Cala shaped the concept for The Yo' with early issues, and the Spring '08 issue won Best in Show from the Associated Collegiate Press at its Fall 2008 Convention in Kansas City.

theyomag.com

Yo Survival Issue Spring 2009

Staff, Letter from the editor: page 2

Table of contents: page 3

NO GUTS, NO GLORY

DSK makes horror comedy aimed to offend everyone: page 4



ROUND TWO

Jones takes festival to the beach: page 8

PUT ON FOR YOUR CITY

Bands ready for downtown's biggest summer scene: page 9



SELF-PUBLISHED, SELF-PROCLAIMED
Yambar tells story of the comic behind the books: page 11



KINGS OF THE RING
Local bar showcases royal rumbles: page 15



LEARNING THE ROPES
Students roll with the punches to put on a show: page 19

WRITINGS ON THE WALL
A photo essay of local graffiti: page 19



PLAN YO SUMMER
Your preview of local summer events: page 19

No guts, no glory

By Melissa Mary Smith

Obsessive: An adjective that accurately describes Rick Fusselman's

relationship with horror movies. Physical evidence to support this claim can be found at Fusselman's home in Girard.

Counting George Romero and Lucio Fulci as his primary influences, Fusselman's basement and various rooms of his house are jam-packed with an extensive collection of horror movie memorabilia and VHS-tapes — all of which

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DSK-PRODUCTIONS

DSK makes horror comedy aimed to offend everyone

number in the hundreds — that would make any die-hard horror fan salivate.

Fusselman's longtime fixation with all things filmically gory, violent and offensive cultivated a desire to make his own brand of original movies.

It was with this desire that he gave birth to DSK-Productions, which over the past six years has become a fixture in the local indie film scene with such cult favorites as "Retards Shouldn't Run with Chainsaws," "Toxic Shock Zombies" and "Holy Shit...Zombies."

Keeping with yearly tradition, Fusselman and company are back at it again with a new movie for eager fans: "Incest Bernie: The Legend of Blood Forest."

"The idea for 'Incest Bernie' was killing me because I wanted to make a backwoods slasher like in the veins of 'Just Before Dawn' and 'Madman,'" Fusselman said.

The film stars Youngstown State University sophomore Brian Johnson as the stalking and foreboding Bernie.

Johnson describes his character as "a kind of feral creature, brought up by the woods," and draws comparisons of Bernie to other well-known horror movie killers.

"He's an inbred, like backwoods killer, like in the same vein as I guess Leatherface," Johnson said.

The basis for Bernie's character was the brainchild of Fusselman.

"The name Bernie came from a funny story my friend Dave told me about a musician named Bernie Shanahan. The name Bernie stuck with me and then I just plopped 'incest' in front of it," Fusselman said.

While Bernie was Fusselman's concept, Johnson added his own originality to the character.

"It was a different acting experience for me, because I didn't get to talk in the movie, so it was like me stumbling around or interpreting other people's movements," Johnson said.

While Bernie has no speaking parts, Fusselman said the character

mainly cries and moans.

With the creation of Bernie also come the reprisals of the goofy and oddball characters Gator and Bubba from "Holy Shit...Zombies," played by Jim Cibella and Jake Johnson.

While in the woods, Boy Scout leaders Gator and Bubba try to teach the two Boy Scouts, Mitch and Harry, about survival. As the movie progresses, the story of Incest Bernie comes out and they discover that Bernie is stalking and attempting to kill them.

Fusselman decided to bring back Gator and Bubba after being bombarded with fan requests; in "Holy Shit...Zombies," their characters were supposed to have died at the hands of a zombie mob.

"We're a couple of country bumpkin, red neck guys who talk about NASCAR, 70s alt-rock and stuff like that. We have beards and mustaches," Jake Johnson, who plays Bubba, said.

Rick "Fu" Mackall, cast as Mitch, is one of the Boy Scouts under the unfortunate and confusing leadership of Gator and Bubba.

"He's a light-hearted man with a

sunny disposition, that is fond of spooning and forced to camp," Mackall explained of his character.

Although the primary characters of actors Mackall, the Johnson brothers, and Cibella remain unchanged in each DSK production, Fusselman believes overall changes in film quality are clearly evident when compared to their first film "Retards Shouldn't Run With Chainsaws" and their latest retail-hell slasher film "Slashing Prices."

"Between camera quality, acting and our FX, stuff has gotten so much better. Like, stuff actually kind of looks more realistic now rather than, 'Hey, why's that blood all orange?'" Fusselman said.

Jess Fusselman, Rick's wife, is the primary FX artist on all of the DSK movies.

"She's like, 'That looks terrible,

me do that,'" Fusselman said.

Like in past films, Jess' role as FX artist — she employs materials like latex and scab blood — is ever-present in "Incest Bernie."

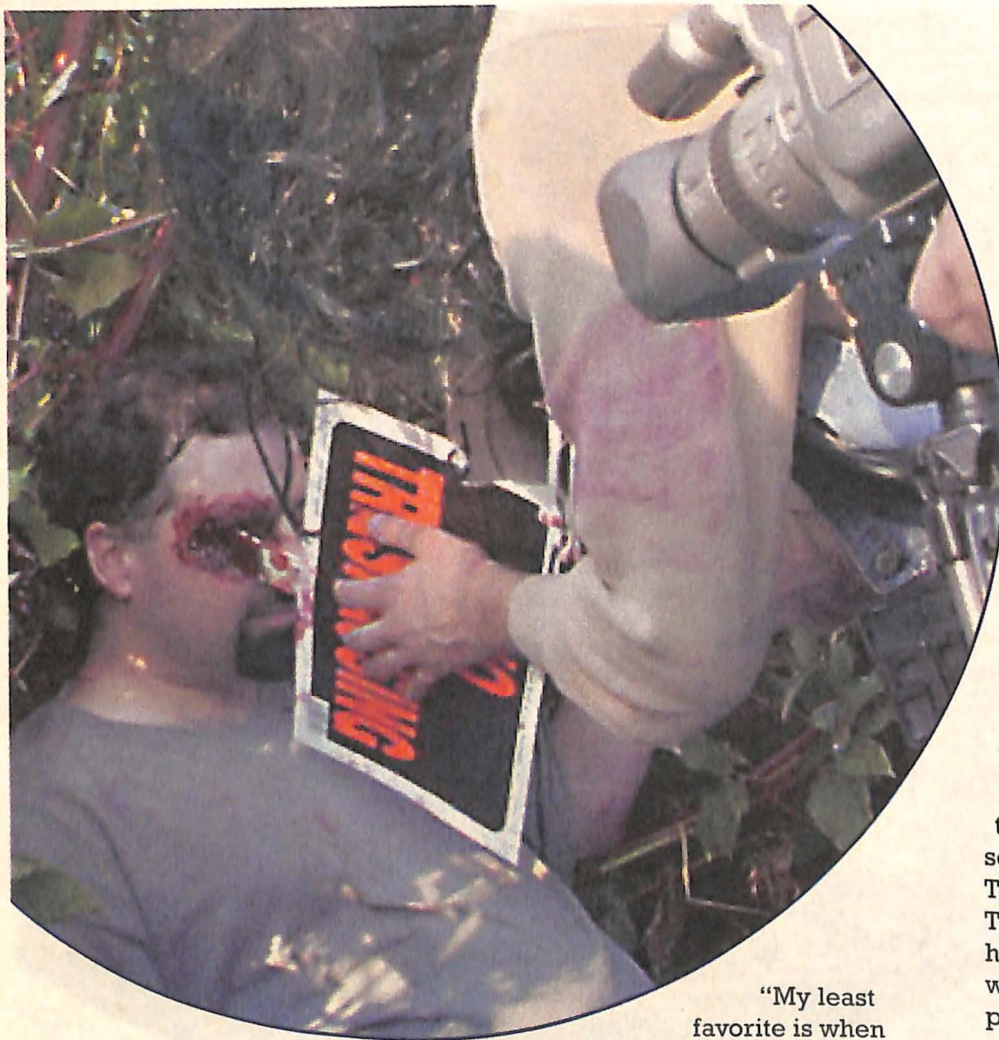
"I wish I was really good. I try to do my best and don't give up. I would love to have some formal training, but low-budget doesn't account for that, so we make do," Jess said.

When compared to earlier movies, which had the camera quality of a family-filmed birthday party, Fusselman has now introduced more updated and efficient technologies to production.

When Fusselman shot some of the first DSK movies, they were done on a High 8 camcorder and it gave the films a grainy quality. The High 8 made it difficult to capture and log footage, since it had to



let



"My least favorite is when Rick edits. I try not to be home," Jess said.

Apart from introducing a better quality camera, FX methods and updated technical materials to the movies, Fusselman has also recently started to cast local wrestlers in acting roles. In "Incest Bernie," local wrestling fans might recognize John Catheline and Flyin' Ryan Burke as victims of Bernie's wrath.

Most of the movie locales are filmed at or around the home of Fusselman. For "Incest Bernie," the ominous forest setting was shot around the Mahoning River late August through October. While still in post-production, Fusselman has scheduled re-shoots to be done in May and June and plans an early summer release.

The history of DSK

Though Fusselman's love affair with horror movies was a motivating factor in creating DSK-Productions,

it was when Fusselman attended his first horror movie convention six years ago that ultimately influenced his decision to make movies.

At this convention, Fusselman met other, like-minded horror movie fans — also low-budget filmmakers — who were selling their movies for next to nothing. Fusselman thought if they could make movies, he could, too.

One year later in 2003, Fusselman made the first cult-followed DSK film, "Retards Shouldn't Run With Chainsaws," which is about a mentally disabled killer who wields a chainsaw and terrorizes a group of four young men looking to buy a house.

When "Retards" first came out, Fusselman said that it offended quite a few people.

"There's always something that offends somebody or makes somebody feel very uncomfortable. That's why I do it. It makes me laugh. The more angry you get about it, the harder I'm going to laugh. That's why we aim to offend as many people as possible," Fusselman said.

Still, apart from just offending, "Retards" has seen a wider array of criticism — both positive and negative.

"With our first movie, people were like, 'this is complete and utter crap,' or there's like, 'this is probably one of the funniest things I've ever seen.' We still get that to this day with our first movie," Fusselman said.

Fusselman admits he and the other two original members of DSK, Mackall and Cibella, have made a special tradition out of "Retards."

"Once a year, we'll sit around and watch "Retards Shouldn't Run With Chainsaws" together and we just sit there going, 'What the f--- were we thinking? Why do people like this? This is horrible!'" Fusselman said.

Fusselman first met and became friends with Mackall and Cibella while all three were working together at Max and Erma's in Niles.

"Rick and I decided to do something with our time and with his

fascination of horror and comedy, it just made sense to try to make people laugh," Cibella said.

"Rick had a crazy idea one day to do some funny horror movies. He had told me that him and Jim did some shorts before they met me, and I had done some amateur sketch comedy with some friends in high school. So with what little experience we had, coupled with each of our eccentric personalities, it seemed like a good idea," Mackall said.

Jess Fusselman recounts becoming a part of the DSK movies by way of her relationship with Rick.

"Well, I was kind of thrown into DSK being married to Rick and all. It is his passion to make movies and so I try to be as supportive as possible. And considering we are surrounded by our best friends when we film, it's not a hard task," Jess said.

Jake Johnson first met Fusselman while at Dark Christmas, a horror movie convention in downtown Warren. Johnson noticed that Fusselman was wearing The Champions of All Time shirt, a Youngstown based band, and explained to Fusselman that they were all friends of his.

At the time, "Retards Shouldn't Run With Chainsaws" was just released and Johnson said that since he worked at a record store, he could probably sell some of the DVDs for Fusselman. Over time Johnson and Fusselman became friends, which led to Johnson being cast as an angry records store clerk in the next DSK comedy "Separation of Church and State."

Johnson's next movie was a starring role in "Toxic Shock Zombies" in 2005.

The first DSK zombie movie, "Toxic Shock Zombies" is about a brand of tampons that immediately causes toxic shock syndrome when inserted and turn women into zombies.

The absurd and comical ideas of the DSK movies and scenes are all Fusselman's concept, but it is also a group effort. The team sits around and throws out ideas to get a

general consensus of what the story should be. Then Fusselman starts to organize everything.

"I'll just basically start writing a like, detailed outline of what's going to go down," Fusselman said.

During production, the chosen storyline can change frequently as time progresses. By the time they get to a finished product, the original idea of a movie is completely different.

As DSK has evolved with production quality and writing efforts, their work ethic and perceptions have changed, too.

"Our old motto used to be 'quantity over quality,'" Fusselman said.

By adopting this motto, Fusselman explained that some of the movies were so bad to the point that they were unwatchable.

Now, Fusselman said that he and the rest of DSK take their time when working on films; while movie production time varies, it usually takes around three months to completely shoot a film.

Humorous memories

Given the obvious comedic nature of DSK movies, over the years each member has retained a favorite funny moment from each movie's production.

Mackall is a fan of Cibella's clumsiness.

"Anytime Jim falls," Mackall said.

Cibella is often known for dominating the blooper reel on all the special features sections of DSK DVDs.

"I can't name just one. Look at the bloopers in any of the movies. I am in 95 percent of them," Cibella said.

Jake Johnson recounted a funny moment that relates to "Hot Justice 2," which was Cibella's super hero concept movie for DSK.

While Jake, Cibella and Fusselman were in Fusselman's room during filming, it was so hot that Cibella sweated through two layers of his clothing: A Power Rangers super hero costume and his secret identity costume.

"It looked like he had angel wings

of sweat on his back. He also looked like a ninja turtle with the mask on," Jake said.

Like his brother, Brian Johnson's favorite funny story also involves Cibella in the Hot Justice series.

"I'd go with Jim falling on his face in "Hot Justice,"" Brian said.

Jess's favorite funny story wouldn't wash off immediately.

"During the last movie, some people — they know who they are — decided to jump into a berry bush and splatter purple berries all over themselves and everyone else. My legs were purple for three days. It was pretty funny, but it always is with DSK," Jess said.

With it till the end

Over the years, the majority of the cast has developed a fervent dedication to working with

DSK-Productions.

Brian Johnson explains that a primary factor in why he continues to do the movies relates to the fact that the DSK members are his best friends.

"I'll be in whatever Rick puts me in — honestly, from now until the end of time. Whatever they want to do, I'm game," Brian said.

"I've been there since day one. I'm not ever leaving. Period!" Cibella said.

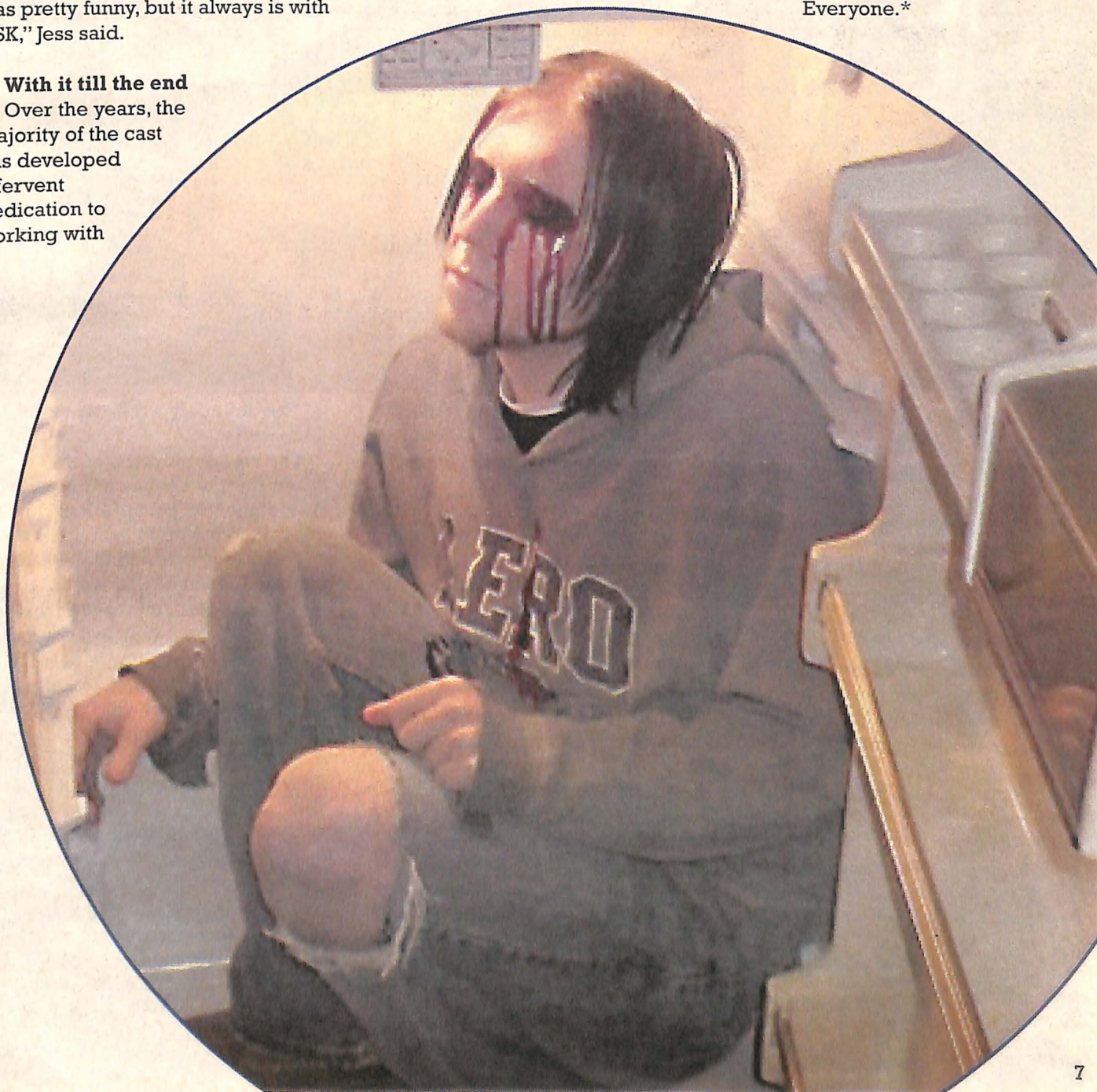
Jess explains that so long as everyone in DSK has the desire to be apart of productions, she will

continue to be a player.

Jake Johnson joins the consensus of Brian and Jess and believes that over time, those whom have been in the movies helped to create the core of what DSK-Productions is today.

Over the years, DSK-Productions have created a unique standing for themselves in the local indie film scene and among fans with their funny originality and horror-influenced creations.

It is with this standing in both groups that is further made unique by their blunt and unforgiving credo: Horror Comedy Aimed to Offend Everyone.*



Round Two

By Sarah Sole

Jones takes festival to the beach



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONES FOR REVIVAL

Music. Beer. Belly dancers. The beach.

The summer jam session that is Jones Fest is back, albeit with changes that can only happen when a venue moves from concrete to water-front property.

Jones Fest will happen this year at Nelson Ledges, June 6 starting at noon and going through the night. Tickets are \$15, which will cover the cost of camping and all-day swimming. Jones for Revival will perform, along with headliners Five Elements, the Young Stonians, Melva and Winslow.

Other acts include: Jazzam, Greenleaf, Rusty Van Band, Groove Prophets, Jahman Brahman, Pro Bono and Acoustic Juggernaut.

Twelve bands that range in genres from jam and funk to reggae will perform this year on a setup that includes a main and side stage.

While the first Jones Fest was held last year on Federal Plaza downtown, this year Jones for Revival — comprised of Jim DeCapua on guitar and vocals, Fred Burazer on saxophone, keys, flute and vocals, Dave Lynn on bass and vocals and Gino West on drums and percussion — wanted concert goers to have an all-night camping experience in a venue that's more genre-specific to jam bands. For this reason, they decided to trade in the city sidewalks for the outdoor, lakeside-barbecue vibe that the Ledges offers.

"You take it all in and it's like a vacation," Burazer said.

In addition to the music, the all-ages, family-friendly festival — BYOB — offers drum circles, belly dancers, fire dancers, vendors and swimming. Food will be available, but people can also bring their own.

The band also looks forward playing outdoors.

"It's definitely a different vibe," Gino said.

The classic jam vibe that surrounds the Ledges happens to be the one that best fits their music. Ever since the band formed in 2004 as a way to hang on to their youth, Jones wrote music that was inspired by a beach-like atmosphere, and consequently evolved into a group with an upbeat, summery sound.

As the band began playing more venues in Southern Ohio, Jones became acquainted with outdoor festivals like the Blues Festival and Ruckus, and even the '07 VexFest in Youngstown. While a bar booking was always a sure deal, they decided that given the option, outdoor gigs were the way to go.

The audience too, is decidedly different. At a bar they are most likely concentrated on drinking, while those who go to a music festival are there primarily for the show, Jim explained.

"Your brain is just in a different place," Jim said of the outdoor experience.

Jones realized that they had a higher success rate outside of the city, in more rural areas like Athens. The band struggles in Youngstown — the city only has around three other bands genres similar to Jones.

While the band said they've gained a collection of fans in Youngstown, they know the possibility of attracting more than 300-500 people here for a concert is slim. While they mostly stick to playing bars, last year's Jones Fest, — the first — brought a surprising 2,500-plus fans to Federal Plaza: Not too shabby considering the band was only expecting about 1,000 people to show up. This time around, the bands are looking forward to playing at the Ledges, since it's hard to get booked there, Jim said. "It's just gonna pretty much be all-out," he said.*

PUT ON FOR YOUR CITY

Bands ready for downtown's biggest summer scene

By Sam Marhulik

What started in 2001 as a showcase of the vibrant and ever-growing music scene in Youngstown, VexFest has grown into an event that just may save the negative image that the city of Youngstown

receives.

Fred Rafidi, owner of local music venue the Plaza Cafe, was the mind behind the scenes that originally founded VexFest along with members of the popular local band "Cyrus." This served as the catalyst for subsequent festivals such as Jones Fest. Rafidi, along with Dan Crump, John Jones

and Jimmy DeCapua of Jones for Revival are operating under the name "Youngstown Local Music" to promote and produce the festival. All men have the same goal in mind: To support the music scene while reviving the image of downtown Youngstown.

VexFest brings dozens of bands to downtown Youngstown to play

in front of a crowd of faces. The event is centered on West Federal Plaza and has two stages outside and two inside the street-side Barley's. The bands do not just come from the city; some have come from as far as New York City and Tennessee. Rafidi said he invites all musicians to submit a press kit for a chance to perform,



PHOTOS BY BRIAN CETINA

regardless of where they are from.

"We obviously can't invite all to perform, but each year we try to grow the festival so we can accommodate more acts," Rafidi said.

VexFest 6 is set for Aug. 23, and Rafidi is hoping for a bigger crowd than last year's roughly 6,000. There is no confirmed roster of who is playing, but bands like The Zou and Asleep are hopeful that they will be performing again, and are just as excited for this year as they have been in previous years.

This will be the sixth time the event has taken place, since there was a brief hiatus between 2003 and 2007. Since coming back in 2007, the event has upped the ante, adding 10 new bands and five DJs for a total of 45 performers. The first performance starts shortly after 11 a.m. on a Sunday, and usually lasts into the early hours of Monday morning.

Though rumors circulated that 2008 was going to be the end of Vex, Rafidi said he may have some new things planned for this year and its future.

"Vex provides a platform for the area's musicians to showcase their immense talent at an over-the-top event in front of thousands of people. Our goal is to one day grow it into a weekend-long event that will attract representatives from labels and others in the industry similar to SXSW or RedGorilla MusicFest in Austin, Texas," Rafidi said.

Of the bands that have played at VexFest, many of them are well-known locals, such as The Zou, Asleep, Cyrus and Kitchen Knife Conspiracy.

Khaled Tabbara, lead singer for the Zou, said he looks forward to playing at VexFest every year that the band is invited, and he is also proud that VexFest is evolving Youngstown into a place that is known for music rather than crime.

"Last year we played in front of thousands of people, many of which we have met on several occasions. It's great to be in Youngstown to get the privilege to play in front of all

these amazing fans, and to play and hang out with all the amazing bands that support Vex," Tabbara said. "Our music is changing this city, and I'm hell-bent on proving that to the world. We played in Florida once and when we said we were from Youngstown, people had generally bad things to say. Six months later we played at the same spot, and people started chanting "Pavlik!" It's amazing to see our city evolve, and we are a part of it. It truly is an amazing feeling."

The Zou has performed at VexFest four times and Khaled and company get a thrill every time they perform.

For some, Vex is a way to get to know the city music scene.

Wake the Lion's frontman Kyle Hoffman isn't from the Youngstown

area, but enjoys the opportunity to perform at VexFest.

"I'm from Newton Falls, which is like 45 minutes away, but I am growing into the Youngstown mold and the scene is much different from what I am used to," Hoffman said, adding that the concert makes them feel like true rock stars for a day. "VexFest is great because it gives all of us in bands a great chance to meet other bands and to meet our fans," he said.

Last year, the Vex headliner was Cyrus, but established local band Asleep played right before Cyrus to a large crowd all their own. Asleep released their debut album in 2006, "All These Things We Will Never Need," and their members are not unfamiliar to the Youngstown

territory.

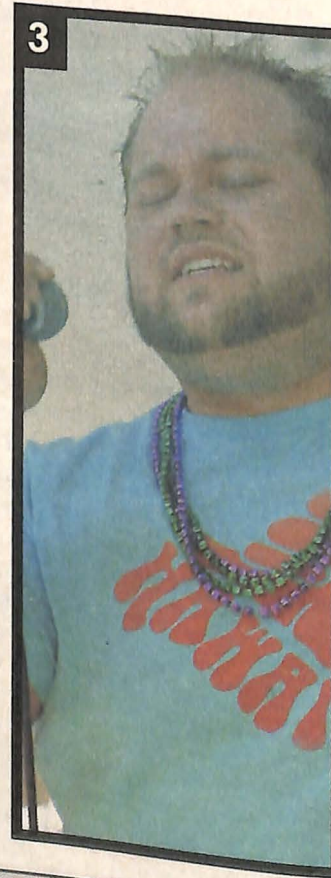
Guitarist and backup vocalist John "Deaner" Dean said being a part of VexFest is the biggest show the band plays all year.

"It's cool seeing Vex grow year after year while we as a band also grow every year. We are flattered to see everyone support us as well as all the local bands," Dean said.

While Dean said it's difficult to compete with bands from bigger markets like New York and Chicago, the band still aims high.

"Being in Asleep is in our blood, and we are busting our asses and will continue to bust our asses to get where we want to be; that's what being in Youngstown is about, and that's what Vex is about," Dean said.*

"Our music is changing this city, and I'm hell-bent on proving that to the world." - Khaled Tabbara



1. Jordan DePaul, lead singer of Jordan DePaul and the Reputations, plays the keys during their 20 minute set at Vexfest. 2. The lovely Kris Mills of Posture Coach strums the bass during Vexfest V. Mills, along with the other two members of the band, switch instruments during sets to showcase their different musical talents. 3. Joseph Jay, lead singer and harmonica player for Acoustic Juggernaut, sings his heart out while grooving to their set at Vexfest V in the summer of 2008. 4. Rob Thorndike, lead guitarist of The Zou, focuses his energy on his guitar and pleasing the crowd. The Zou always puts together a giant crowd at Vexfest since they're a hometown favorite.

SELF-PUBLISHED, SELF-PROCLAIMED

By Brian Cetina

Yambar tells story of the comic behind the books



When you have a childhood dream to be famous, the first thing you say you're going to do is leave the town you grew up in. But if you look hard enough, your hometown can become a fountain of opportunity.

Meet Chris Yambar. Yambar is known for his work with *The Simpsons* and his Bongo Comics character Mr. Beat. Despite his work in mainstream entertainment, Yambar has never left his native city of Youngstown.

"I enjoy the city," he said. "The cost of living is affordable here and everything is close together. You would have to have a jet to live in Los Angeles."

While Yambar loves the city for its accessible living, it's also the place where he discovered his love for comics.

Baby steps

The love for comics was introduced to Yambar early on in life with a little help from his father.

"It all started when I was a kid and my dad used to buy me comics as a bribe so I would sit still during a haircut," Yambar said.

Soon after diving into the comic book world as a child, Yambar became hooked.

"The first comic book I read was 'Casper the Friendly Ghost' and then stuff like 'Tarzan' and 'Batman,'" Yambar said.

"Casper" may have sparked Yambar's comic interest, but the diaper-wearing

Photo courtesy Janet Macoska

devil from "Hot Stuff" is what really got him hooked. It was then that he realized that if you bought the right thing, you could get into some trouble with your mother.

So as he got older, he continued to buy more and more comics.

His love and passion for comics grew stronger over the years and he started his first "company," Yambar Comics, when he was in sixth grade. Each Yambar Comics issue was hand-drawn on notebook paper without the ruffled edges to help make it look more professional.

Yambar and his friends would work on the comics together, each taking separate duties. He would draw the characters, a friend would staple them together and another would begin to sell them throughout class.

After the school year, all the money that was collected was put toward ice cream bars for

him and his friends, which they "ate till they were sick."

Imagination and adventure in his childhood helped to feed Yambar's passion.

"We had a huge monster yard with a horse farm and we always had adventures," Yambar said. "We would start the morning as astronauts, then we become apes, aliens, cowboys, [then] break for lunch, then find out what dinosaurs we would ride around on. Adventure and role-playing were always important."

Unfortunately, due to sixth grade graduation and summer vacation, Yambar Comics ended. Yambar continued through school, though.

"There was one summer where I almost bailed on my senior year," he said.

This happened when the last "true" freak show was in town. "There was a whole other world with the carnies," he said.

They were looking for help and leaving for Europe, so Yambar was interested. They told him he would have to take down tents and do set-up.

"The guy told me I looked like someone who wanted to breathe fire. I thought, 'Yeah, that will get you any job if it's on your resume,'" he said. "After that, I was in the ministry."

He didn't joining the freak show and stayed in school, but Yambar never gave up on his true dream.

"When I would come home from school, I would sit down and spend hours writing and drawing and reading about the history of comic books," he said.

Yambar and his father had somewhat different ideas of his professional aspirations.

His father, who Yambar describes as a "steel mill" guy, went from school to the service, married and went to work in the mills. While that

was essentially the plan for families then, Yambar didn't want to work in the mills and disappear for years in the steel industry.

Instead, he stood true to his heart and didn't lose the goals he had set for himself. He continued with his art form.

Still, Yambar held many jobs before he hit his career dream.

"I did a lot of work in restaurants and had to learn how to cook," he said. "I learned to cook, which was good if you're honest about yourself and are going to be a bachelor and know no one wants to see you naked."

Chris later went on to attend Mahoning County Joint Vocational School where he enrolled in the commercial art program. He was introduced to mass production and a lifetime that could become a career. Everything now became a reality; everything he had ever hoped for was possible.

And he knew it.



"I realized I could do anything if I knew how things worked," he said.

Becoming a big deal

Yambar graduated in 1979 and was accepted to several art schools. Their high prices, however, prevented him from attending. This pushed him deeper into the art field where he freelanced as a "pop artist" in 1987.

Yambar worked in graphic art and communication while briefly attending classes at Youngstown State University on and off for two years.

"YSU gets a bad rap now. I think you can't count it out; if you live here you know it gets a false persona and its requirements are even highest in the state I believe," he said.

In the '80s, Chris established Manna Underground Press and independently published an underground paper, "The Activist." The company held a solid reader base in 13

countries.

After years of working independently and continuously marketing his own characters, Yambar and a friend began a new publication to showcase comics.

In 1994, Yambar and Gary Smith created Substance Comics. Though they produced three 64-page issues, the publication never reached a year in circulation.

"I enjoy creating characters and giving them a personality," said Yambar. "The best place to go is someplace high traffic like the mall. I will sit at the [Southern Park] mall and watch people and their actions and the way they speak. It tells a lot about a person. You see some interesting characters."

On a brighter note for Chris, that same year also sparked the birth of what might be his most popular character in independent comics: Mr. Beat, the self-proclaimed "King of the Beatniks."

Mr. Beat, a humorous comic book that dealt with art and social commentary, was created as a single gag cartoon by Yambar at The Beat Coffeehouse in Youngstown. The character became loved by The Beat and was soon put on mugs and shirts.

Chris gave the character his name, his own limited-edition comic and then hit the road. By 1997 the first issue, "Mr. Beat Adventures" hit the shelves and was sold throughout America.

Mr. Beat became a worldwide selling phenomenon and sold 45 thousand copies in America as well as an astounding 350 thousand in Germany. The issue was the single-best selling issue Bongo Comics ever had in Germany.

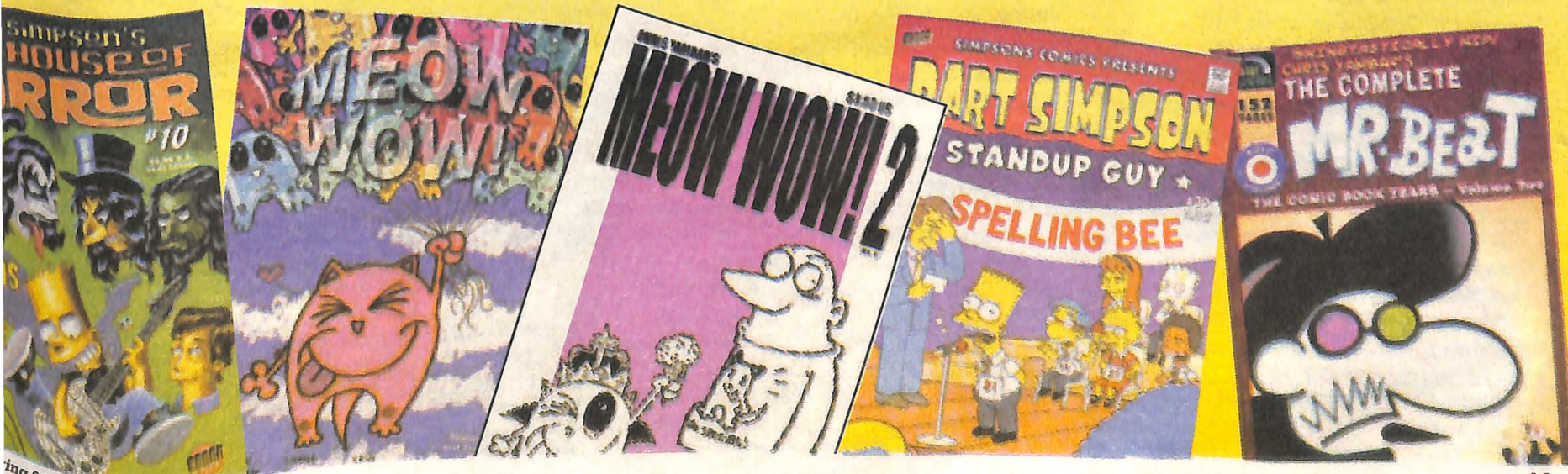
Simpson's creator Matt Groening and Bongo Comics employees began reading the Mr. Beat comic, and Groening loved the character. The two met at a comic book convention when Groening approached



"I learned to cook, which was good if you're honest about yourself and are going to be a bachelor and know no one wants to see you naked."

Chris Yambar

The Simpsons characters and comic books copyright 20th Century Fox.



real. It most certainly is real. Real physical. On top of the physical ability needed to grapple with your opponents and perform acrobatic stunts, there is also the possibility you can get hurt. To date, Burke has been in the hospital twice; once for a concussion and once because he bit



The Normal Guy

off the tip of his tongue.

"I always knew it would come with the territory, and it's in the back of my mind that I could be seriously injured, but I always tell myself I could be hurt doing anything," Burke said.

Ryan said his mother, Patricia, has been very supportive of his dream to be a professional wrestler. At every *CWE* match at The Wedge, she is at a table near the bar selling Flyin' Ryan Burke merchandise. She paid for his lessons too, knowing how important this was to her son. She has yet to collect on the debt.

"She knows I'll pay her back someday," Burke said.

And yet, even with all of her exposure to her son's high-flying exploits, she still worries about him.

When Ryan has out-of-town matches, he makes sure to let his mother know he is coming home in one piece.

"Yeah, I actually make it a point to call her after shows to let her know I'm okay," Burke said sheepishly.

The Clown

During the week Justin Nottke is an art director for Jamestown Group in Cleveland. Like Ryan Burke, he is not your typical muscle-bound wrestler.

"I'm not your average beefed up guy coming out to some hard rock with really long hair with tattoos or anything," Nottke said.

Nottke has been a fan of wrestling since he was a little kid. He can remember watching wrestling as early as 4 years old; one of his most cherished childhood toys was a Jake the Snake action figure that he received for Easter one year. When Nottke reached middle school, he and his friends would practice wrestling moves in his backyard.

"We'd lay out a few mattresses in the back and have a gymnastic mat on it, and it just kept progressing from there," Nottke said.

Unlike Burke, Nottke has developed a character, which he describes as flamboyant. When he wrestles, he wears neon green shorts with fuchsia stripes; a cursive fuchsia F adorns the back. On his upper arm is a tattoo of the Batman symbol with a gold handlebar mustache in it.

"I like to tell people, 'If you like my mustache, you're going to love my bat's 'stache,'" Nottke said.

Nottke's character is called the Megastar Marion Fontaine. As Marion Fontaine, Nottke tries to be as ostentatious as he can possibly be.

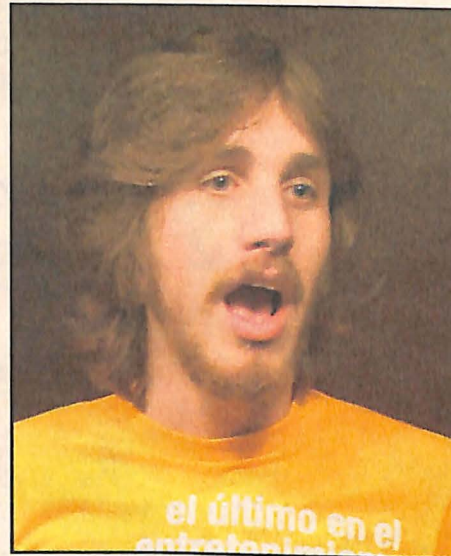
"I need to be the most entertaining person out there, and I need to make some people laugh," Nottke said.

When coming out to wrestle, he is full of swagger. With 'Shining Star' by Earth, Wind and Fire blaring, he struts to the stage bobbing his head to the music, periodically stopping to pose for the ladies in the audience.

Part of Nottke's act deals with the power of the mustache. When he is losing during his matches, he is known for yelling, 'I need to harness the power of the mustache!' When he is winning he will yell, 'Mustache

Power!

"People out there are going to see a lot of athleticism, and I kind of want to blend comedy with that athleticism," Nottke said. "Because obviously, when I come out in these tights and I've got this facial hair, you are going to laugh."



The Clown

Nottke said the way his character is perceived depends on the setting. At places like The Wedge he is a face, a good guy. At other shows he is a heel, or a bad guy. One group universally reviles him, however.

"For some reason kids just really don't like me," Nottke said.

All in all, Nottke said he is just there to have fun and have a good time. He does have a few words of advice for his opponents though.

"When I wrestle with someone for the first time, I tell them to be prepared because I am going to try to make you laugh," he said.

The Bad Guy

Tom Badger isn't really a bad guy, but his character Patrick Hayes is. Heels are an essential part of any wrestling show. Without a bad guy, it would just be good guy versus good guy. Villains advance the story lines of *CWE*.

Badger began wrestling when he was in high school. He and a friend would travel regularly to Akron to watch wrestling at the Shamrock

nightclub. Soon afterward, the promoters began holding wrestling workshops. This landed him an opportunity to wrestle on Cleveland-Akron Television.

For Badger, having the fans hate him tells him he is doing a good job. He wants them to hate him when they go home at the end of the night.

"It is a great feeling because it means I am doing my job. It means I am connecting with the fans as a bad guy villain," Badger said.

Month after month, there is a group of people that only come to the show to heckle Hayes. They have even printed up shirts with his face crossed out and 'We Hate Hayes' emblazoned on the back.

"I want them to hate me so much that they hate me, that they want to kill me," Badger said. "Even if they cheer a cool move, I want them to hate me."

Badger said there is a lot of training involved for his character. Even though he isn't the biggest guy in the world, he continues to do cardio and strength training so that he is able to compete and look good while he is in the ring.

"You've got to look the part. Anyone can throw on a pair of tights and wrestle, but if you want to look good, you've got to work hard," Badger said. "Not everyone is going to be 6-foot-3, 200 pounds, jacked up."

Badger credits his success as a wrestler to his ability to make the necessary facial expressions to make the act believable.

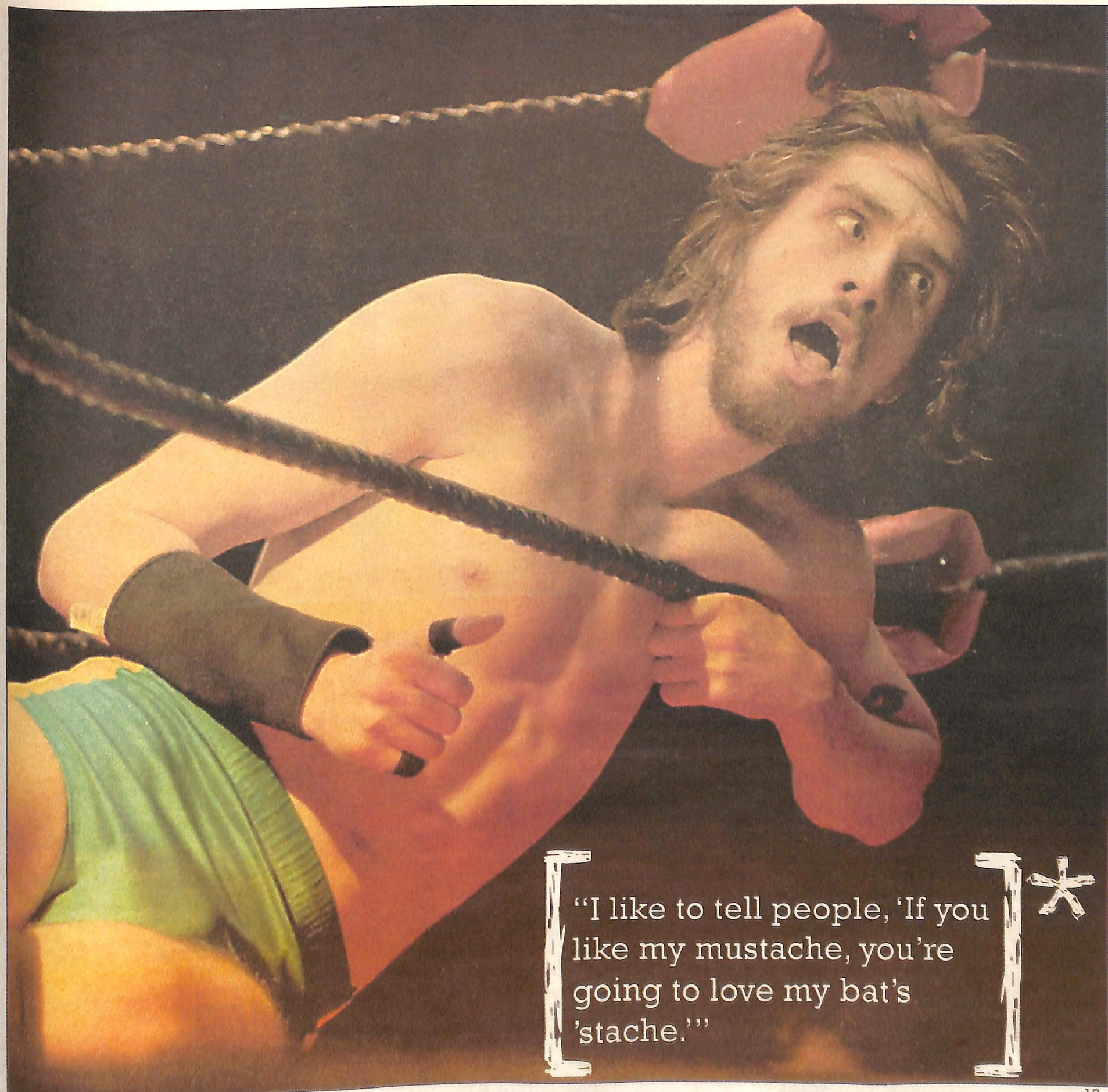
He says without the facial gestures, no one would care about his character.

"I'm not the biggest guy in the world, but my facial expressions, it just gets underneath people's skin. They want to see me get my ass kicked," Badger said.

Badger said he is just a normal guy who lucked into this sport. In his spare time he likes to cook.

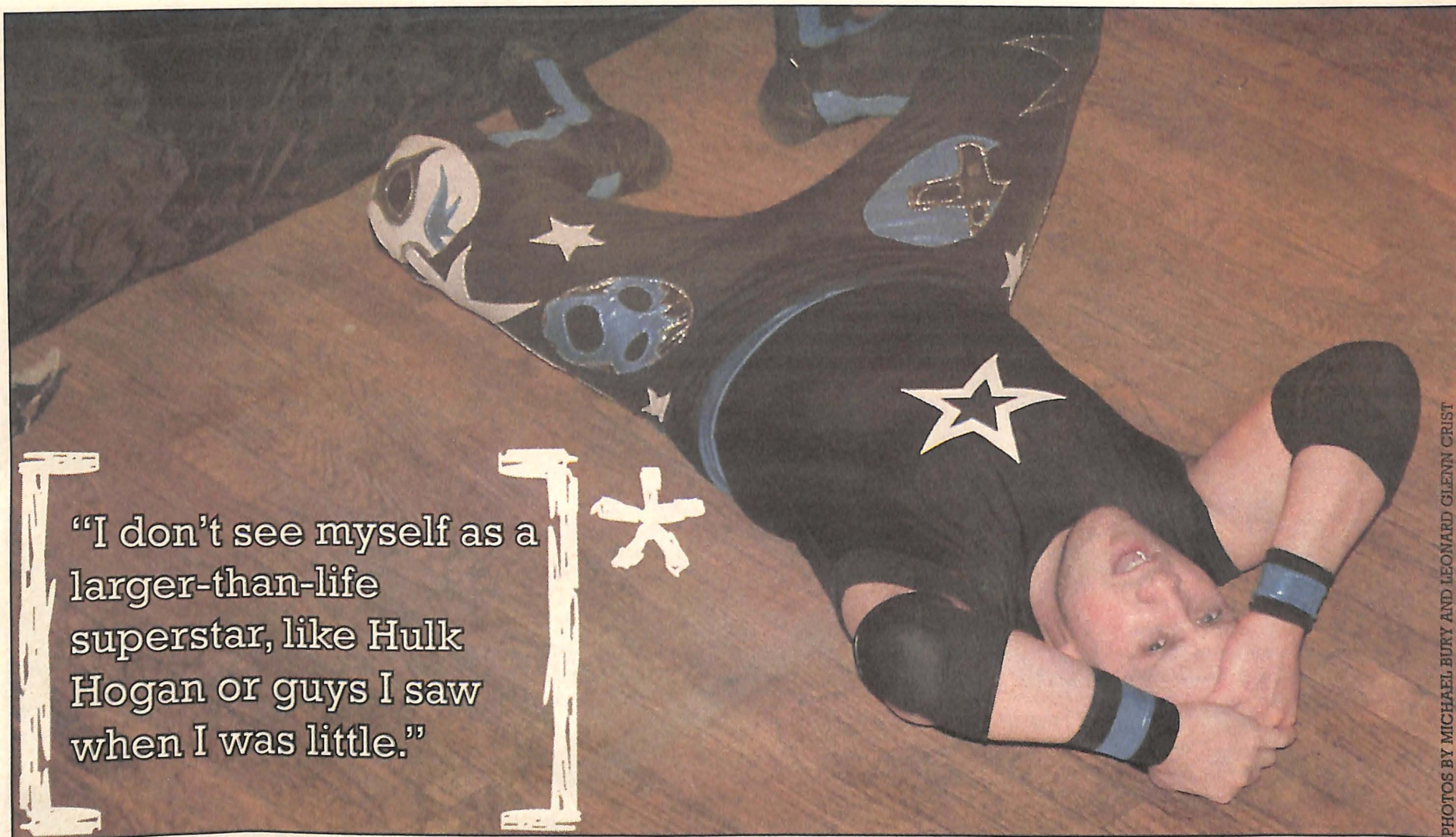
He plans to attend culinary school in the near future.

"I'm just a regular dude living his dream," Badger said.



“I like to tell people, ‘If you like my mustache, you’re going to love my bat’s ’stache.’”





PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BURY AND LEONARD GLENN CRIST

“I don’t see myself as a larger-than-life superstar, like Hulk Hogan or guys I saw when I was little.”

The Promoter

On show days, Kyle Terreri shows up at noon to start setting up. Terreri was also interested in



The Bad Guy

wrestling at a young age; his family told him that whenever wrestling was on TV he would watch it. In high school Terreri did some Greco-Roman wrestling; however he doesn’t see how the two connect. During that time he and his partner, Nick Volinchak, would help a wrestling promoter. That was their on-the-job training. Then a few years ago, Volinchak and Terreri decided the time was right to start WWE.

When you talk to Terreri about wrestling, you get the impression that he is being intentionally vague about what he says; he doesn’t want to give away any secrets. There is a long-standing tradition of people involved in wrestling not telling the audience the matches are predetermined. It was only when asked whether wrestling is fake or not that the tight-lipped Terreri gave

his most telling response.

“It’s less than you think, more than I am willing to go on the record and say,” Terreri said. It is this comment that reveals what WWE,



The Promoter

and wrestling in general, is all about. No one goes to a wrestling match thinking that the outcome is predetermined. This is the 1980s. If you get close enough, you can see the wrestlers whispering in each other’s ears to plan their next big move. Anywhere outside of the ring, their overwrought facial expressions and acting would be unbelievable, save for soap operas.

But in the confines of the bars, high school gyms and backyards, these normal guys with normal jobs are allowed to act like fools, jokesters, heroes and villains and every single one of them loves it. When they talk about why they wrestle, none of them ever say, ‘it’s just a job,’ or ‘I do it to pay the bills.’ That passion is why WWE is such a big success. They’re just big kids doing what they love.*

In Elyria, there stands a building covered in corrugated metal with an American flag blocking the window and a large man sitting guard at the door.

This could easily be mistaken as a sign of trouble, and you wouldn't be far off the mark. But if you take the time to talk to the guard, you'll learn his name is Jeff Traxler, and inside the door is the training center for his wrestling promotion, Mega Championship Wrestling.

The classes are headed by independent wrestling veteran "Killer" Chris Kole, who has spent more than 15 years inside wrestling

rings across the country. But before students earn the right to learn from the master, they must first learn the basics from experienced classmates, such as Joey and Luis Diamante.

Every week the lessons deal with how to safely perform the dives, throws and low blows that make up wrestling. The students also learn how to properly add to the theatrics, such as filling a room with their voice or stomping the mat when a punch connects to make its impact felt across the arena. While learning to toss the opposition out of the ring is definitely necessary to one's

success, the most important instructions cover how to properly take the bludgeons and bumps that make up a good wrestling match.

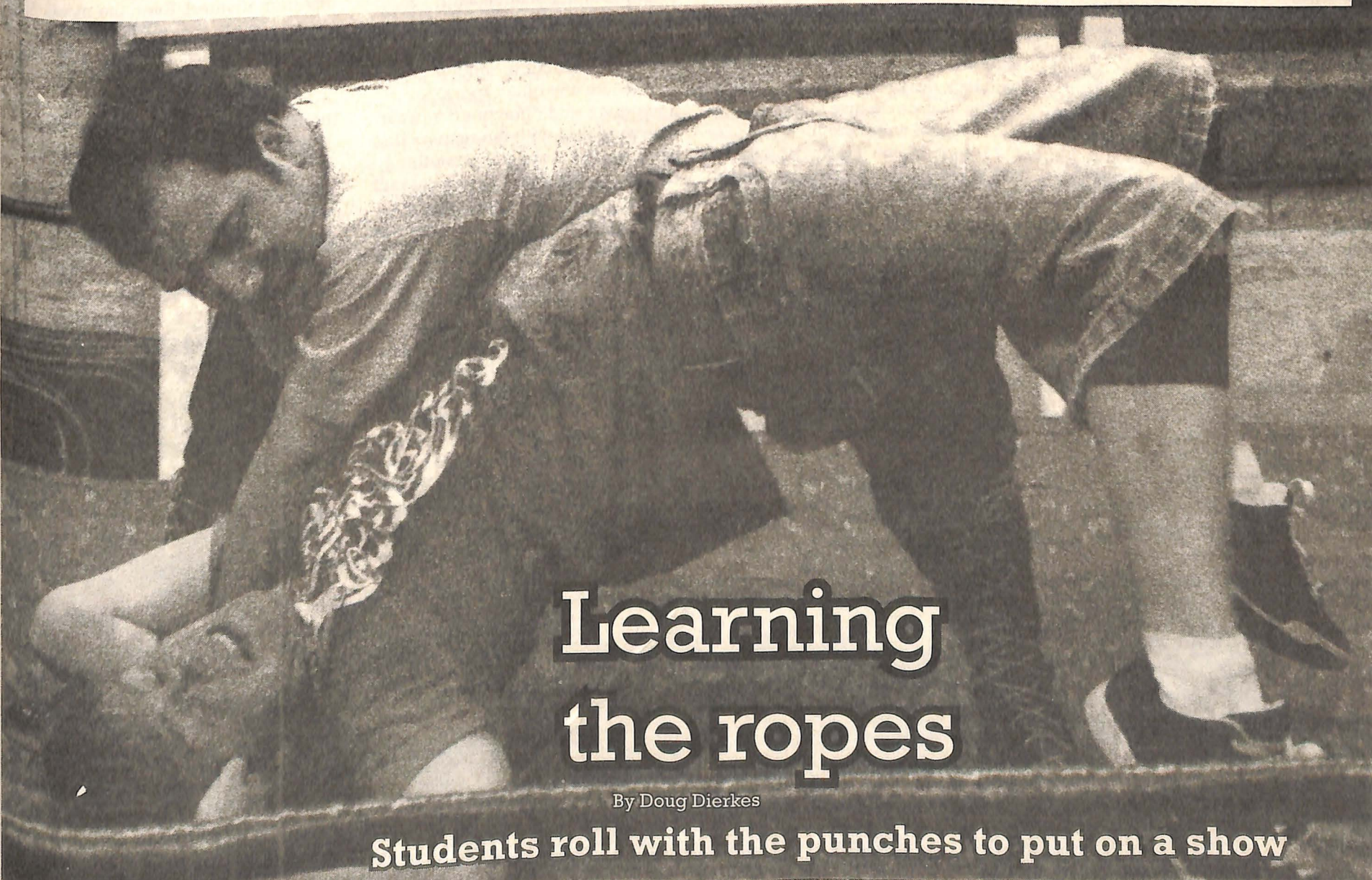
"When I was in training, I was learning how to do bumps for six months straight," Joey Diamante said. "I never got to pull off any moves, only take them. But the advantage is that now, I'm ready to get hit by anything that the match requires. That's definitely more important than learning how to perform a finishing move."

"It's still athletics," Luis Diamante said. "We have to be agile enough to do what we do in the ring. Yes, you have to be a bit

of a showman; you have to get the crowd going, but at the end of the day, you need to have some kind of ability. Luckily, we can bring it out of you if it's hidden."

Luis Diamante, real name Luis Rodriguez, had been enamored with wrestling since he grew up in Puerto Rico. When he was 5 years old, his grandfather took him to his first wrestling match between Abdullah the Butcher and Carlos Cologne, and wrestling has had a hold on him ever since.

"I've always said I've wanted to learn wrestling, and everyone around me was like, 'Don't do it, man. It's a waste of time,'"



Learning the ropes

By Doug Dierkes

Students roll with the punches to put on a show

Rodriguez said. "But I was following my dreams and that's the way I had to go."

Wrestling fans looking to become wrestlers will travel from Cleveland, Sandusky and even Youngstown to train at the MCW facility. Youngstown native Mike Brown has been a student at the school for several months, even after he gathered a small following in the Ohio wrestling circuit. "I get recognized down at the Wendy's sometimes, but I still come here to improve," he said. "A great wrestler should always want to expand, always want to learn something new. You have to know how to be safe in the ring, and how to keep someone else safe at the same time."

For some, wrestling offers an escape from the routine of a regular job. When Gregory Vogt was living in southern New York, he went to college in Rhode Island for a degree in culinary and food service management. While in school, he saw an ad for a wrestling school in Boston and started taking time to learn how to "pretend fight." Disappointed by the lack of wrestling shows in the northeast section of the country, Vogt took up an offer from a friend to move to Sandusky to see how the wrestling scene here would treat him there. It's a bit of a change, but one he's willing to work through.

"I used to be head chef at this high-end, New York restaurant that served \$40 to \$50 entrees," he recalled before listing his new job

title as head chef at Ruby Tuesday. "It's not the kind of work I was used to, but they understand when I need to leave for a few days to wrestle."

If Vogt has any regrets, it's that where he lives prevents his parents in New York from seeing him in the ring. "My parents aren't too thrilled about me pissing away my expensive college education to be a pro wrestler," he said. "But they still approve; they know I'm doing what I love."

The school serves several important functions for the local wrestling scene. The near-constant stream of students will ensure that promotions across the state will always have a fresh pool of talent to choose from. More importantly, the grueling nature of the course and the drive time for a majority of the students is meant to weed out those who lack the proper commitment for the abusive nature of the professional wrestling lifestyle.

"It's kinda like the Navy Seals," MCW referee Jeremy Hudgens said. "They're trying to weed out the B.S. and find the people who really want to be there. You have to be able to tough it out."

"Toughing it out," in most cases, means continuing your training through an injury. Everyone in the facility has suffered in the ring, from bruised ribs to broken bones. But only the passionate students are willing to push through the pain and keep with the education.

"I trained for three months with a knee that I could barely bend," Rodriguez said. "You have to have that want, that greed, to be a better wrestler."

MCW wrestler Marion Fontaine said the drive to succeed is essential to becoming a great wrestler.

"If you're not gonna put your whole heart and soul into it, don't even bother. When you first get in, things are going to suck for a while. Just like any other business, you have to pay your dues, and you should pay them. At this level, the money sucks, you'll be driving for hours to get to a show and you still have to set up the ring and earn the respect from everyone else in the locker room," Fontaine said.

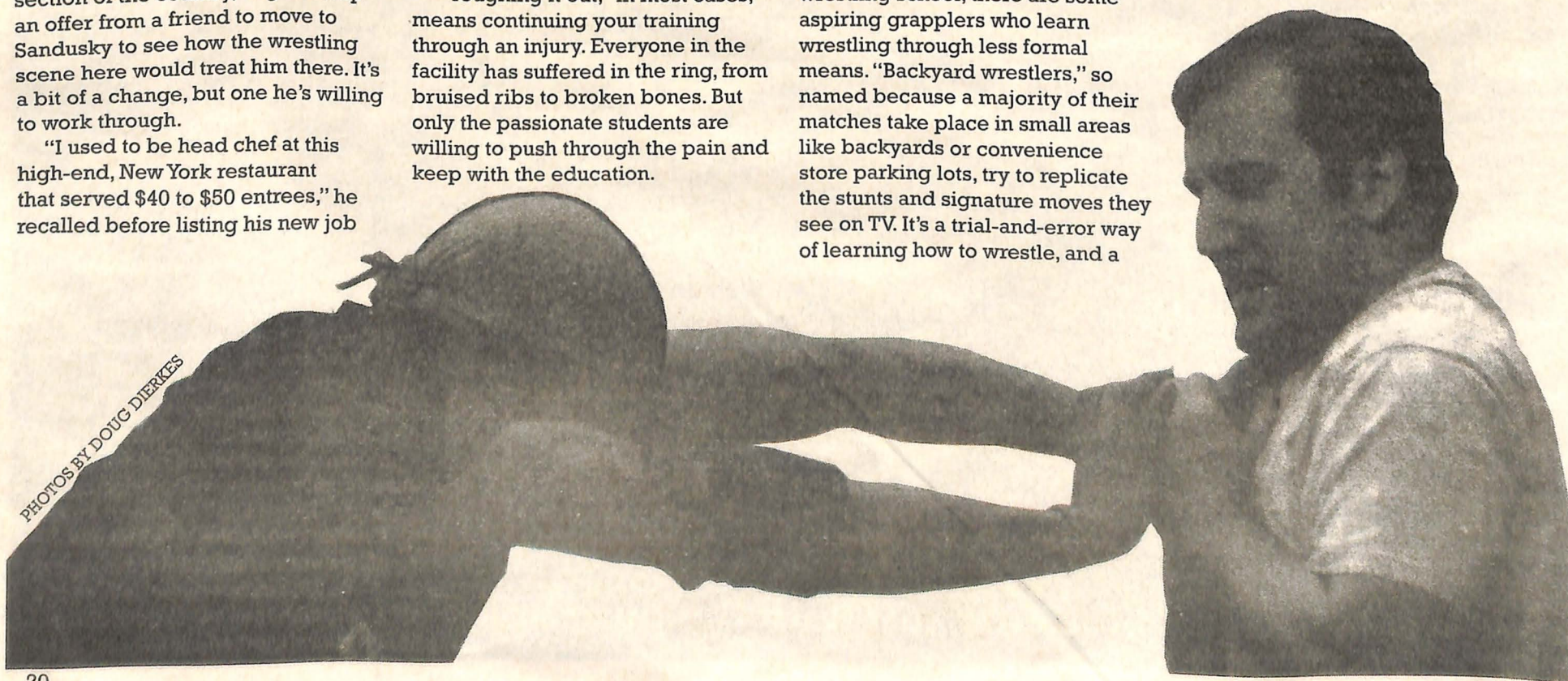
The earning and giving of respect is another lesson that can't be learned at wrestling school.

"It's like any other sport," Rodriguez said. "You need to treat everyone else with the respect they deserve. But respect is something that you got to have; you can't teach it. I can beat it into somebody's head, but that doesn't mean they're going to do it." While motivation and respect are necessary for wrestling school, there are some aspiring grapplers who learn wrestling through less formal means. "Backyard wrestlers," so named because a majority of their matches take place in small areas like backyards or convenience store parking lots, try to replicate the stunts and signature moves they see on TV. It's a trial-and-error way of learning how to wrestle, and a

great way to build up your portfolio on YouTube. However, the risks are especially high, which is why Hernandez does not approve of this approach to education.

"The only way to learn wrestling is to come to a real wrestling school," he said. "When you're out there trying to do these moves and you don't know how to do them safely, then you're a hazard to yourself and whoever's in the ring with you. This is an industry where people have gotten hurt and even died in that ring. You have to strive to be as safe as you can, and not just for yourself, but for the other person in the match with you."

Wrestling is not a business for the unmotivated. Even the most recognizable faces work more than 300 days on the road each year, and that's not including the wrestling education and personal training that come with the territory. Injuries are a question of "when," not "if." But if you're willing to endure the harsh conditions that accompany the life of a nomadic warrior, there just might be a place for you in professional wrestling.*



Writings on the wall

By Lamar Salter and Josh Stipanovich

A photo essay of local graffiti

Hidden under bridges, painted across street corners and scrawled along abandoned buildings are messages. Some of these messages survey the struggles of inner youth. Others simply boast a particularly violent group, while some memorialize the past.

Whatever the message may be, there is a clear and evident expression that someone is making that takes advantage of the environment as his or her own personal canvas.

Graffiti has been a tradition since ancient times. From the speculative stories of the caveman, to the hieroglyphics of Egyptians, to the angry New York youth who feel they have no voice of expression, graffiti is about as old

as the concept of human creativity itself. You can find the art's mark many different places around the world, and Youngstown is certainly no stranger to it.

With the fall of the steel mill industry, the Mahoning Valley faced a crushing blow to its economy. The result left many out of work and the city became a mark of depression. Following a formula of poverty and creativity, graffiti became popular among inner-city youths who, under the influence of hip hop culture, started "tagging" various buildings and walls around the city. As of the 1980s, graffiti became an urban art. Flashy letters, symbols and portraits were featured all over New York, Chicago and even on the West Coast. While some were vindictive in nature, graffiti had a universal purpose that included political views, memorials, and

raw artistic emotion, similar to the music that influenced the creators.

Malcolm Mobutu Smith, a ceramics art professor at Indiana University, described the relationship between graffiti and hip-hop.

"It's competition," Smith said. "It's just like hip-hop. It's a battle."

Just as rappers battled rhyme to rhyme with each other, graffiti artists battled for achievement and bragging rights, he said.

As a student at the Kansas City Art Institute, Smith — under the moniker CAI — was among those battling.

"We blew up Kansas City," Smith said. "We had to quit at one point or face some real trouble." The days in his youth as an artist influenced Smith's outlook on art and helped him develop his sense of expression. He now teaches art classes and uses what he learned

on the streets to develop his style in the classroom.

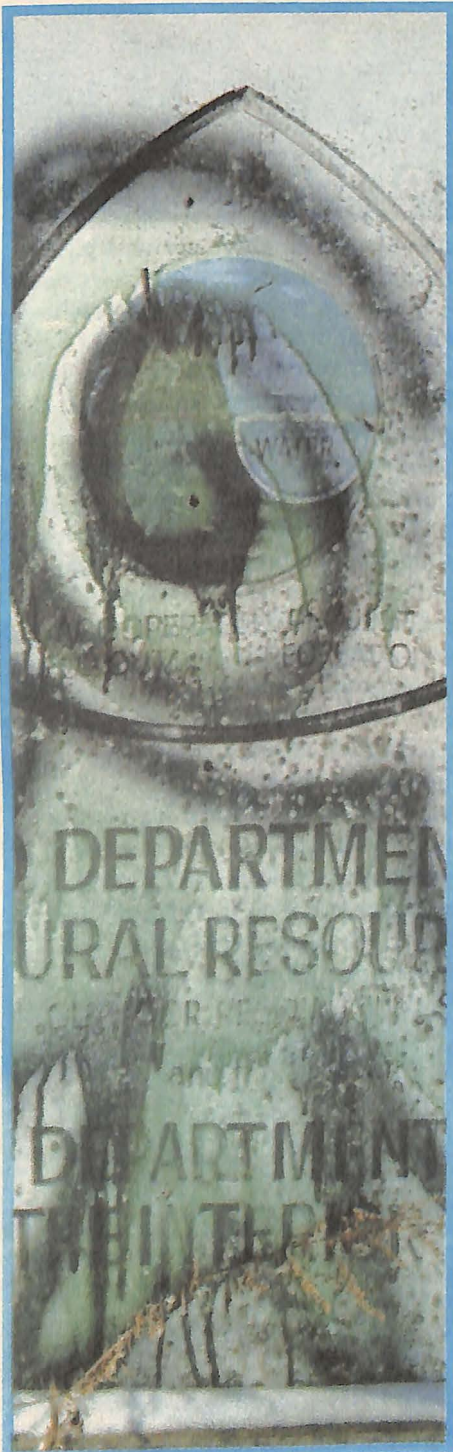
"I use graffiti as part of my own working habits," Smith said. He hopes to one day teach graffiti directly as a course and use the ethics and the style of graffiti as a means to motivate students to fully understand the art.

"A lot of graffiti artists have a higher work ethic than some of my students," Smith joked, explaining that the risks attached to graffiti give artists a stronger sense of motivation than those who pursue more traditional art.

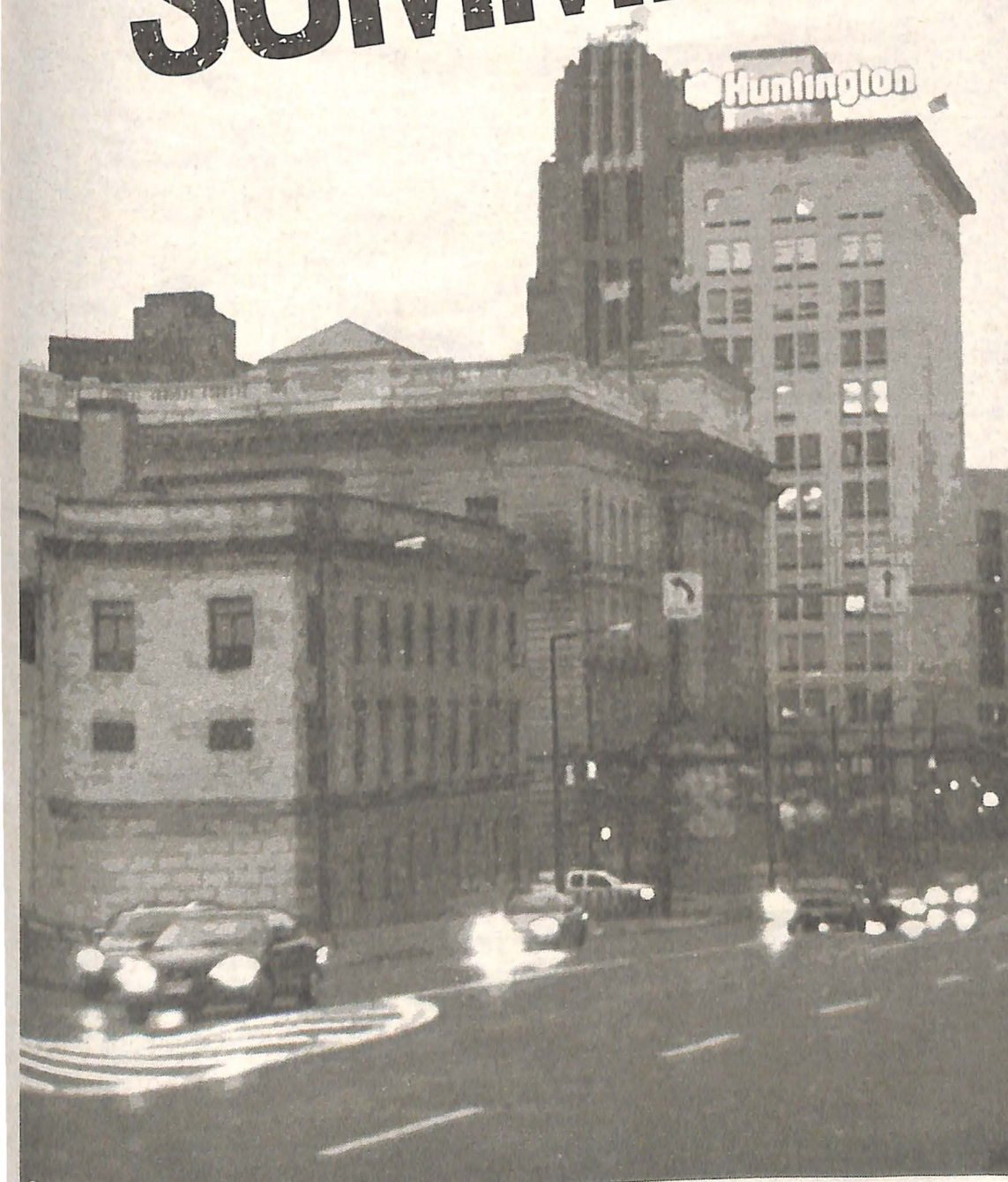
As for today, as hip-hop becomes more and more mainstream, the culture follows along with it. Graffiti has become a more standard artistic form and while street tagging is still illegal, it has revolutionized into a widespread phenomenon.*

PHOTOS BY LAMAR SALTER AND JOSH STIPANOVICH





PLAN YO SUMMER



JONES FEST

Saturday, June 6, noon

Nelson Ledges Quarry Park, Portage County
\$15

STEEL VALLEY SUPER NATIONALS

Friday, June 19 - Sunday, June 21

Quaker City Raceway, Salem

Fee required for entry

SOUNDS OF SUMMER FOURTH OF JULY AT YOUNGSTOWN

Saturday, July 4

Anthony's on the River, fireworks from B&O Station

FIREWORKS BY THE ROTARY CLUB OF CANFIELD

Saturday, July 4, 6-11 p.m.

Canfield Fairgrounds

FORTE ON THE 50TH FIREWORKS

Saturday, July 11, evening

Stambaugh Stadium, Youngstown State University

SUMMER FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

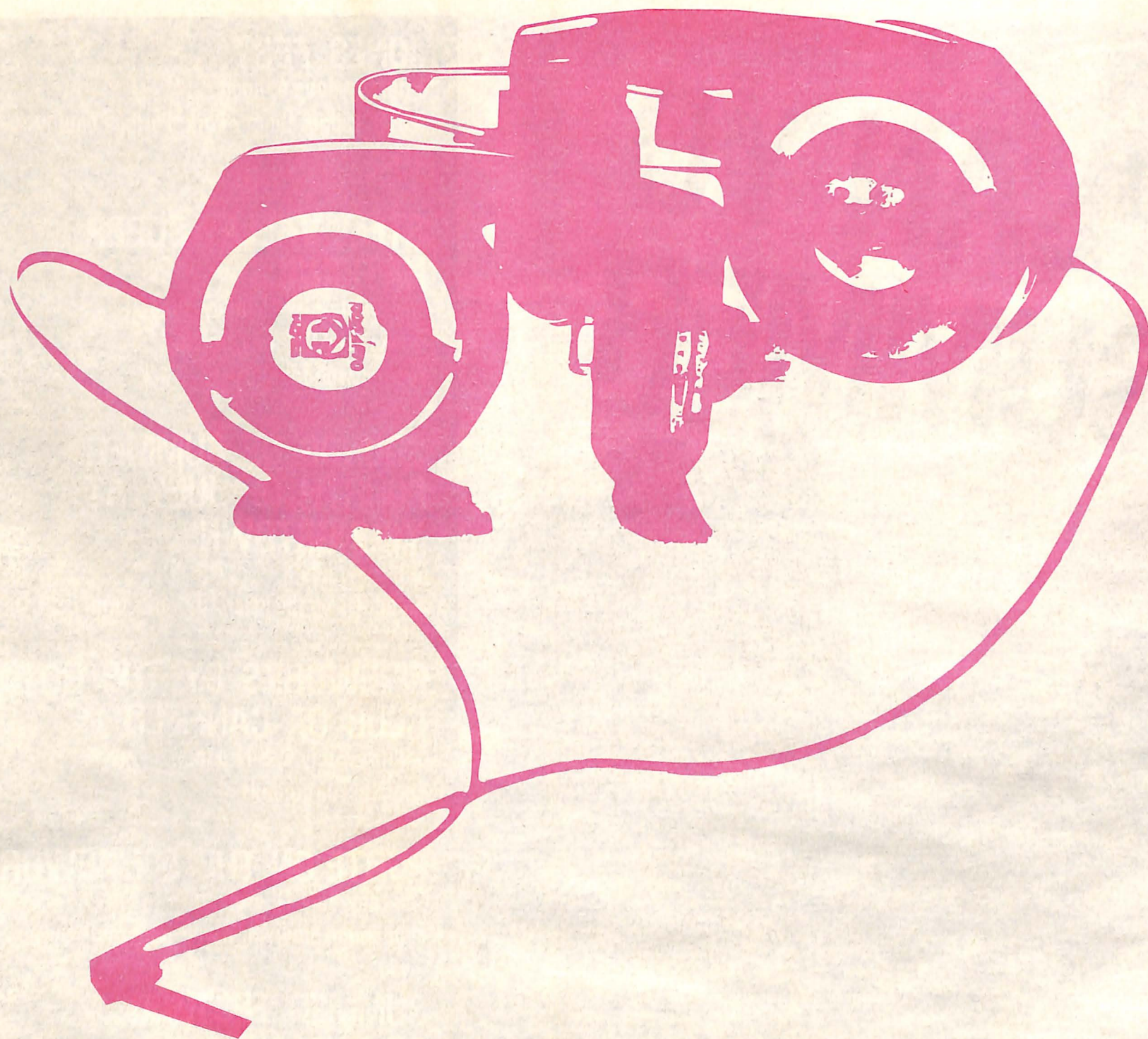
Saturday July 11, Sunday, July 12

Youngstown State University campus

VEXFEST

Sunday, August 23

West Federal Plaza



*Calling all writers, editors,
designers and photographers*

www.theyomag.com

editor@theyomag.com

330 941-1991

theyomag.com