

Sullivan County Democrat

Callicoon, New York
August 11, 2006 Issue

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BETHEL — Thirty-seven years ago, it birthed the Woodstock Nation. Wednesday evening, Bethel Woods put Music in Action. Goo Goo Dolls bassist Robby Takac returned to musical "hallowed ground" with a request. [Story by Jeanne Sager](#)



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IDA/Thompson Battle Not Over

MONTICELLO — A meeting of the Sullivan County Industrial Development Agency on Tuesday ended with no change in the organization’s determination to give tax breaks and abatements to Catskill Dermatology, which is leaving its office in the Village of Monticello and moving to Bridgeville. [Story by Nathan Mayberg](#)

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Contributed Photo by Kevin Ferguson for Bethel Woods

ROBBY TAKAC OF the Goo Goo Dolls gestures with his hands to make a point during a focus group talk with students from Liberty. Listening intently are, from left, Justine Sutherland, advisor to the Liberty Leadership Network team, Miranda Hardy, Georgia Siegel and Amarynth Sichel.

Liberty Kids Get Upfront With Takac

By Jeanne Sager

BETHEL — Thirty-seven years ago, it birthed the Woodstock Nation. Wednesday evening, Bethel Woods put Music in Action.

Goo Goo Dolls bassist Robby Takac returned to musical “hallowed ground” with a request.

Head of his own non-profit, Music Is Art, Takac has been itching to get a program up and running that hooks kids in an educational way

[Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development](#)

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by showing them the “ins” of the recording industry.

He’s a famous rock star, but Takac said he knew something other program directors, teachers and administrators don’t – his experience wasn’t enough.

“People my age always seem to think they know what the right ideas are,” he said. “We know, from our perspective, what the right lessons are.

“But too many educators spend time building up steam for something that isn’t exactly what the kids want to do,” he explained.

Takac’s Music is Art program puts instruments in the hands of children.

It’s that simple.

But he wants to do more.

“I was able to find the thing that grabbed kids,” he said. “But I wasn’t schooled in how to school.”

For that piece of the puzzle, Takac turned to Bob James, longtime friend and educator in the Buffalo area.

James heads up the future leaders network with teams in high schools throughout New York State.

Among them is a team right in Liberty – a team that had the street cred and the smarts to earn a face-to-face meeting with Takac

Wednesday evening.

The teens were pulled out of their summer vacation for a focus group with Takac before he went onstage to rock out with the Goos at Bethel Woods.

In recent years, the Liberty leaders have filmed several of their own videos dealing with peer pressure, suicide and depression and drugs – films that have been played for the whole school.

The kids used their musical influences to tell the story, to ground the life lessons in a youthful way.

Ryan Cerullo, a rising junior at Liberty High School, said the idea is to let other kids know that although they’re the “leadership” team, they’re all on a level playing field.

“We try not to put out the idea that we’re better than them, we don’t lecture,” he explained. “I feel that we reach out to kids.”

“If they have a problem they can come talk to us,” added Justin Sutherland, a recent graduate of Liberty. “They can come talk to us instead of an adult.”

Sutherland said he felt like he made a difference in his four years on the leadership team – after one meeting at the school, a girl approached the team to tell them her friend was a “cutter.”

The girl had been self-mutilating, but when approached by kids her own age rather than an intimidating adult, she responded.

“Because of this, I feel like we saved a life,” Sutherland said of the team.

Sutherland is one of the more musical team members – he’s headed to college in the fall to study music.

That interest and background made them ideal for Takac to tap into these teens for ideas.

And the kids were ga-ga to meet the Goos. Their last production, a short called "The Crowd," included a Goo Goo Dolls song on its soundtrack.

"We listen to them and everything they say through their songs," said 15-year-old Ishan Trivedi, younger brother of leadership team member Pranali. "Now it was our turn to talk."

And talk they did.

"We got tonight ideas we hadn't really thought about," James said.

"It was funny to hear some of the comments just socially that were made," Takac said. "I love the energy of that . . . the excited optimism of something going to happen."

That's the idea behind the leadership team at Liberty – allowing teens to put their natural enthusiasm into helping their classmates.

"You take the kids with optimism and hope and light, and you pair them with kids who've given up, and that's when the magic happens," James explained.

That magic has benefited the team members as well, Pranali Trivedi explained.

"We're making a difference in our school . . . and along the way, we're improving if you want to call them leadership skills, talking, listening," she noted.

Trivedi said she hopes Takac was able to glean something useful from the experiences she and her classmates have had in Liberty.

"I really liked that everyone else is willing to listen to us," she said, "that people recognize that we as students might have something to say."

Rachel Parkhurst isn't on the leadership team, but the 18-year-old is on her way to study at Boston's Berklee School of Music.

She was honored to talk to someone who's "been through it all" about her passion.

"Music changed my life," she said earnestly. "I've never been an amazing student, and I never excelled at anything.

"Then I picked up the trumpet, and I was talented . . . I had something to be proud of."

Georgia Siegel comes from the opposite side of the spectrum.

She plays in the band, and her family is intensely musical (her dad, Gary, is even a music teacher), but she wouldn't call music her life. Still, sitting down with Takac, having a rock star zero in on what she had to say, made an impact.

"Usually with bands, they're not into talking to fans," she said. "They have thousands and millions of fans, and they don't need to talk to a bunch of kids.

"But it was just as cool an experience for him as it was for us."

Takac did seem to be having fun.

Even after spending more than an hour in a focus group with the

teens and rejoining his bandmates, Johnny Rzeznik and Mike Malinin, to get ready to go onstage, Takac returned to the spot backstage where the kids were milling around.

Sitting on the edge of a small garden, Takac answered questions and allowed the kids to touch his funky dreadlocks.

“What did I get from these kids?” he asked. “These are real kids – these are not a bunch of f***-ups.”

The stories he heard, the ideas they provided, will go into a pilot program for Music in Action by fall.

The nine-day program is expected to be in schools by early 2007, according to James, although there’s no idea yet of when it will come to Liberty.

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from Bob James 716-912-6656 (call 4 photos)

.....following pages have bigger text for fuzzy faxes.....

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 8, 2006

CONTACT ROBYN GERRY @ BETHELWOODS (# NEEDED HERE)

Local Students Shape Goo Goo Doll Member's Music Business & Attitude Training Course

Optional Bethel PR title: BETHEL HOSTS STAR-STUDENT CONFERENCE TODAY @ GOO GOO DOLLS SHOW

Bethel, NY

Save the Music meets **Making the Band** meets Bill Gates' 2005 call for a renaissance in education.

Members of the Liberty High School Future Leaders Network team received an exclusive invitation last week to attend a private backstage focus group to preview and critique a new school based program that mixes character education with music business skills.

The window of opportunity for the meeting is a local stop at Bethelwoods on the Goo Goo Dolls world tour. The Grammy nominated band's bassist, Robby Takac, is host. Takac is currently gathering "best practice" ideas from experts in education, youth-development, marketing and entertainment.

Music In Action – Industry skills and attitude training for kids looks to first serve and inspire "at risk" youth, then others. It features a mix of high tech tools, recording studio and radio workshop field trips and live videoconferences with music industry insiders, in a kind of mentoring dialog.

"I've read studies on how top program designs rely on research and focus groups", states Takac, founding member of the Goo Goo Dolls and director of the community collaborative nonprofit group, Music Is Art, in Buffalo (details below). "That's why we're talking today, you know, to help us understand what challenges they face and what we can do to make this program really help kids, not just be another glossy but no results benefit."

The Liberty student group was selected due to their success in designing and delivering pop-culture influenced prevention films and workshops. Impressed with their efforts, the New York State Education Department recently forwarded their 2005 "lifeguard" film to the NYS Department of Mental Health for potential inclusion in their new state-wide suicide prevention school initiative. Liberty's 2006 film, "The Crowd" about teen relationship choices included Goo Goo Doll songs in its soundtrack.

The team was suggested to Takac by their long-term leadership trainer, Bob James, recognized by New York State Education Department for a history of designing "research-based, quality" leadership curriculum. Takac and James share the same hometown of Buffalo NY.

Music in Action begins pilot sessions this fall in Buffalo. Foreseeing wide interest, the program is designed with national capacity and introduces innovations that may draw support from teachers and parents.

Findings from today's focus group will be analyzed and then posted on-line by August 22nd @ www.MusicInActionSchools.org.

*Back-story on Music is Art:

Since its inception in 2003, Music Is Art has brought a diverse mix of original music, art, instruments; events & opportunities to over 350,000 people, and is one of Western New York's most recognized and innovative promoters of original music, arts appreciation, and more in the academic and community arts scene.

www.BuffaloRoots.com reported recently: "**Music Is Art 2006 was not only another success** [June 2006 street festival in Buffalo], but it is becoming a standard by which other music and art festivals, and successful Buffalo/Western New York musicians and artists, are to be measured."