

Hanging out

Teen-age Yuppies rock, roll in downtown Birmingham

By Alice Collins
staff writer

Their primary vehicles are skate boards and bicycles. Some drive motorbikes, a few have cars. Their attire ranges from combat boots, black leather jackets and berets with large fake jewelry pinned on, to surf shorts and other usual summer casual clothing. Some have adopted the bleached, dyed and spiked hairstyles of the punk rockers. They love listening to music, espe-

cially punk rock, and performing skate board antics and talking to each other. They also love to talk about music and skateboarding.

But most of all — like the older Young Urban Professionals — these young teens love hanging out in downtown Birmingham. They are mixing and dining over at the Midtown Cafe and Richard & Relis Restaurant, these younger minglers aren't far away.

They can generally be found every night between 10 and 10 p.m. — on masse — covering the sidewalks and

parking lot areas on Martin between Heartfelt and Bates and spilling over onto the plaza of Birmingham City Hall and nearby Shain Park.

BIRMINGHAM police admit the kids are frustrating to them and annoying to some adults in the downtown area. And when 10 o'clock approaches every night, one or two Birmingham patrol cars arrive and tell them it's time to break it up.

"But they're fairly well behaved and apparently aren't doing anything wrong except perhaps loitering," said police Capt. Millard Squire. "We ha-

ven't had any serious difficulty.

"In my opinion, the main problem is that adults in the downtown area perceive them as being hostile because of the large numbers, the volume of noise and the bizarre way some of them are dressed." Some are elaborately costumed as punks.

One of the Birmingham officers who've been assigned to shoo the youth away at the appointed time described the kids as "very polite."

"They stay until we clear them out. They'll say, 'yes officer.' They'll leave. But as soon as we go, they begin coming back again. Or sometimes they'll move to the park or another corner and have to be reminded.

"THEY'RE NOT out there pouring alcohol down their throats," the officer continued. "Some may bring alcohol, but not many, and it isn't noticeable."

Many of the kids perceive the police as "bustlers" when they order them to leave.

"They think we're bad," grumbled a 17-year-old Birmingham youth last week as he was leaving. "We're right here at city hall in the shadow of the police station. How can we be? What are they going to do, bust us for socializing?"

Another youth, 16-year-old Greg Swart of Bloomfield Township in a black leather jacket and beret, said, "There's no place to hang out except in Birmingham. I wish they'd open up an Arnold's Place, like on 'Happy Days.'"

DOWNTOWN Birmingham has been growing in popularity as a hangout for teens since the beginning of the summer. The ages of most range from 13 to 18 years.

The crowd has continued to grow to a point where, on an evening when the weather's good, there may be as many as 80 to 80 boys and girls.

"Many of them are so young that there's no transportation other than skate boards involved," said Squire. "Some are dropped off and picked up."

The hanging out apparently started with the skate board craze. The front steps and plaza of Birmingham's city hall and the city's smooth downtown sidewalks and streets began to draw youngsters.

Some come into town in the afternoon and skateboard at city hall. Other popular skateboard sites are parking structures and the Continental Market mall at Woodward and Merrill.

SKATEBOARDING in front of city hall naturally spilled over to the nearby corners. The skateboard enthusiasts and observers began drawing others until it became the place to be. The kids come not only from the communities of Birmingham-Bloom-

field, they're also arriving from Troy, Southfield, Royal Oak and other nearby cities.

The outdoor telephone at the corner becomes "theirs." The regulars know the number and call in to see who's shown up and who's expected.

Last week The Eccentric interviewed and photographed some of the teens. Some of the schools they said they attend are Groves, Seaholm, Troy, Southfield-Lathrup, Lahser and Marian.

Some bring their radio and tapes and we interviewed a few who belonged to musical groups, another who publishes a magazine that reviews backyard skateboard ramps and visiting professional rock groups.

Rich Watson, 17, of Troy was sponsored in skateboard contests along the east coast beaches this summer by a trucking company, Tim Flynn, 17, of Birmingham said he competed on the east coast too.

The kids say they mostly "come to meet people, come out and have a good time."

Meanwhile, Birmingham officials say they're hopeful that the resumption of school will mean a decline in the hangout activity.

Magazine geared for hardcore music fans

By Dave Varga
staff writer

It's called Beef Rag, named after the lyrics of a song by a group called Wasted Youth.

It is a magazine — or just plain "zine" — put out by and for punk rock or "hard-core" music enthusiasts by a small group of Birmingham-Bloomfield teen-agers. They are readying the sixth edition for its press run of about 500 copies.

Sure, it's not a slick, glossy publication. It isn't even very readable, often with poor ink runs, misspelled words and unpolished writing. In other words, Beef Rag will probably not replace Cream as Birmingham's entry in the popular magazine field.

But the underground publication, just a year old, is getting better. It is adding a national record outlet to its distribution sites, which now include a number of local record stores and whatever the editors can peddle (for 50 cents each) at local hard-core music shows.

"THESE PEOPLE are trying to do something with their time," said Kurt Walker, a 17-year-old Beverly Hills resident and Groves High student. "It's keeping them out of trouble. At least we'll have the experience we have trying to sell a product. It's hard to go up to a kid who looks like he can kill in an alley and say, 'Hey, you want to buy a Beef Rag?'"

Walker and Greg Swart, 16, of Bloomfield Township do not look like they kill in alleys.

Swart, also a Groves student, said he started the magazine as a joke a year ago. The first two issues were free and it showed. They photocopied about 80

copies. They decided to get more professional reproduction for the third issue and paid \$150 to have it printed. It sold for 25 cents.

Since they have virtually sold out each edition, Swart said, they have continued to grow.

"We'd eventually like to make it become the biggest hard-core magazine to come out of Michigan," Swart said.

Walker, who is also in a hard-core band, said they plan to produce an extended-play record featuring a collection of songs by local bands under a Beef Rag record label. They also want to put on shows.

Meanwhile, they pump any profits back into the magazine, they said. With an eye apparently on the bottom line, Walker said, "The advertising should pay for the magazine pretty soon."

THE IRONY of the situation is impossible to escape. Punk rock, forged in the streets of England, is basically defiant, anarchistic music.

Yet here is a group of teen-agers that is certainly not underprivileged. (The three editors are from Birmingham, Bloomfield Township and Beverly Hills.) But, they are attracted to the same musical influence.

"I don't think of myself as a punker," Walker said. "A lot of ideas in punk music are anarchy and all that. That's for the birds. I'm more into the music."

The music itself is fast — faster than most rock music — and loud, without too much melody or harmony to get in the way. Among the lyrical styles of hard-core — sort of an American sliver to punk — are straight edge, dealing with positive values and no drugs or alcohol, and bent edge, which does not promote any moral positions.

Business profit seminar slated

"How to Improve the Profitability of Your Closely Held Business" is the subject of a two-day Financial Management Seminar sponsored by NBD Bancorp that is being offered in Troy and Novi in September.

The seminar, conducted by Management Advisory Services of Seattle, Wash., explains how small business owners or managers can maximize profits through proper financial and management control techniques. The course fee is \$300, which in-

cludes text and other materials, two lunches, a cocktail reception and a cassette tape of a seminar program.

The seminar will be held in Troy Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 10 and 11, at the MSU Management Education Center and in Novi Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 24 and 25, at the Sheraton Oaks Hotel.

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Swart said current rock and pop bands charge around \$15 for a concert, but local hard-core shows often feature three bands for \$3.

"It's fun just to go to the shows," he said. "You have to admit it's fun to watch these people."

They said it's interesting to see groups of about 30 teens from the Birmingham-Troy area attend these shows in small Detroit or Dearborn clubs.

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