

# Gallipani takes cue from Van Zandt

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Rockit for Kids founder/director Bruce Gallipani is accustomed to being asked about his "school of rock" by parents who are thinking about sending their children to his Middletown-based musical institution.

"I hear that all the time," Gallipani said. "I'm not claiming originality. But what I'm doing is a little different."

According to Gallipani, his institution wasn't inspired by the Paul Green School of Rock. Rocker/actor/DJ Steven Van Zandt triggered his concept.

"I was listening to his 'Underground Garage' show on Sirius, and he said that rock is everywhere," Gallipani said. "Punk rock is in restaurants and stores. It hit me that I could help my community and bring rock out even more."

Like Paul Green's School of Rock, Gallipani's Rockit for Kids introduces young, fledgling musicians ages 8-16 to the rock-band concept, but unlike Green's national franchise, it's a mom-and-pop operation.

There are no more than 38 slots for children at Gallipani's academy, and the former drummer of '80s rockers X Davis oversees every last detail.

"I'm totally hands-on," Gallipani said. "I need to have control over every band and every song the groups do. The kids always want to do AC/DC songs, but their songs aren't always appropriate. But we play songs kids love. We do some AC/DC, The Beatles, Guns N' Roses and The Rolling Stones. The kids have fun. Another thing that's important is that each student and parent can reach me. We do things another way here."

The children — many of whom, according to Gallipani, know some riffs but not songs — learn tunes and what it's like to share music in a band format.

The cream of the Rockit crop auditions for Gallipani to perform at a venerable venue. For the second time in Rockit For Kids' three-year history, the big show will be held at the Count Basie Theatre, which happens to be just down the street from Red Bank's School of Rock.

"It's funny how that is," Gallipani said. "This is a great thing for the kids. They get to play on a big stage. It's an adjustment for them, but they love it."

The old joke about how to get to Carnegie Hall — which is practice, practice, practice — in this case applies to getting to the Basie as well.

"That's what I encourage these kids to do," Gallipani said. "We meet once a week. It would make it easier for me if I ran an intense camp and we met a couple of times a week, but it's better for the kids if they come in once a week and work on music at home. Then they come in here and put it all together. I'm so proud of these kids. They come in as soloists and they learn what it's like to work in unison."

Ten bands from Gallipani's Rocking for Kids will grace the Basie stage today. The action is fast and furious.

"There are no actual breaks between bands," Gallipani said. "In the time Bruce Springsteen takes for a sip of water and addresses the audience, (that) is the amount of time there is between bands. We keep things moving. There are no dull moments."

When Rockit for Kids made its debut at the Basie in August, a crowd of 500 witnessed the show. "It was a nice crowd, but now I hope to fill the place," Gallipani said.

"Maybe not with this show but somewhere down the line. When they open up the balcony for us at the Basie, I'll know we're doing well."

But Gallipani is pleased that his program is at its current level and that it exists at all. A year and a half ago, Rockit for Kids hit a speed bump.

"It was a tough time," Gallipani said. "I would ask high schools and other places and we were turned away left and right. One day I walked past the Basie and found they were looking for a rock program. We were a perfect fit. It's a great situation for me and the kids since they get to play the Basie, who gets their program. Everybody wins."