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Photo by Erika Gentry  
A familiar sight to anyone passing through west Eugene is an eclectic mix of fans waiting in front of WOW Hall for the doors to open on a performance night.

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## Offbeat tradition continues at WOW

By Edward Klopfenstein  
Emerald Contributor

Hey, they don't call the alternative rock mecca of Eugene "WOW" for nothing.

The Community Center for the Performing Arts, at the corner of West 8th Ave. and Lincoln Street, has nothing but wow in its September and October entertainment lineup.

Rock, reggae, folk and other alternative forms greet music lovers who appreciate tunes outside the traditional genres.

That's been the work of this mostly all-volunteer crew and non-profit business since its inception in the 1970s. Taking over building that housed the

Woodmen of the World - a fraternity of wood workers - the performing arts groups offered mostly alternative music.

Bob Fennessy, WOW Hall publicity director, said the place played an important role in nurturing alternative music. Many earlier bands found their outlet at WOW while being turned away from more traditionally-based concert halls. Now, with alternative bands finding wider acceptance, WOW has in turn opened up its stage to more rock and pop groups.

With it, the building has progressed. The dance hall now includes a "floating floor," Fennessy said, meaning dancers can still thrash without the leg strain they got on concrete floors. He calls it one of the best dance floors in the state.

The building's new sound system, complete with JBL speakers, also gives audiences more bam for their buck.

The current hall holds 500 people, including 100 in the basement where alcohol is served. A large screen TV there transmits front stage action.

But the source of the hall's success is volunteers. Fennessy said volunteers do most of the manual labor and keep the community group's nose to its mission: "Providing entertainment and opportunity for the youth of our community," as Fennessy puts it.

And now the music. On Sept. 21, the hall will feature "Widespread Panic." This is "southern fried rock" along the lines of the Allman Brothers Band and Lynyrd Skynyrd. "Now William and the Smokin' Rhythm Prawns," an alternative rock and roll band, will play Sept. 25.

On the following day, Sept. 26, Alice Di Miele will sing her unique mix of eco-political-feminist-folk songs.

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