



Corvallis bands battle for the birdbath.

BY MELISSA BEARNS

Coronyism can have some positive results. Take the **Ward 5 Battle of the Bands**, one of the cooler, more underground music events to happen in Corvallis. It all started back in 2001 when City Councilor Rob Gándara was trying to help his buddies, the members of the ska band Five-N-Out, get some ink.

He made an official city resolution declaring Five-N-Out the house band of Ward 5. It drew some publicity, but maybe not the kind Gándara wanted. Turns out only the mayor is allowed to make resolutions, a rule Gándara, then new to the City Council, didn't know about.

Petty city politics aside, the incident spawned the 2002 event, rife with more favoritism — Gándara picked the three bands that played. But this battle actually had some voting involved. In fact, the slogan was "Vote early, vote often."

"There were two basic problems with that method," Gándara said. "We couldn't announce the winner until the votes were counted, and someone pissed in the ballot box." Eventually all the piss-stained votes dried out and were counted. It was a landslide, with **The Richard Hedderts** winning by more than 200 votes even though the head count in AJ's that night was closer to 120.

The following year you might say the Ward 5 Battle of the Bands actually achieved official status. It's still held at AJ's, which is technically a bit south of the Ward 5 boundary, but who's checking? Gándara opened the event up to all bands who get their registration in on time, and a panel of judges now decides the winners each night. Local publications including the *Barometer* and *The Gazette-Times* publish public notice of the event for a few weeks prior to the entry

deadline: the ominous Ides of March, or March 15. The battle is held the Thursday, Friday and Saturday closest to or including tax day, so this year it's April 14-16.

But the best part is the grand prize — the bowl from an old bird bath that had been sitting in Gándara's yard for years. Each year he writes the name of the winning band on the edge of the birdbath in marker and presents it with pomp, circumstance and the aid of a few strong men. The following year, it's passed on to the winning band.

"Part of the reason I started the battle was to help promote local music," Gándara said. "Corvallis has an amazing number of talented musicians and great bands. It's been more successful than I ever hoped, and that just proves to me that there's a hunger for local sounds."

AJ's, with its wood paneling, dim lighting and long layout that allows the bands to play at one end of the bar and drinkers to hang out at the other, is an ideal location for the battle. "I love hosting it and I think it's good for local bands to get their name out there," said Manager Josh Heman. "It's a popular event and it brings out people that don't normally come out, who don't normally frequent this place. People want to see different music, new music."

Gándara credits the Ward 5 Battle of the Bands with helping bring some of Corvallis' more underground bands into the mainstream. "Five years ago no bar in Corvallis would touch punk music," he said. "Now it's out and all over town. It's not that it didn't exist, it just wasn't a part of acknowledged culture. Many of the bands that play in the battle are punk, and I think giving them some initial exposure helped change that." ★

THE WARD 5 BATTLE OF THE BANDS

**April 14-16,
9 pm, AJ's
\$3 (each night)**

THURSDAY, 4/14

Psych Ward Junkies

The Hounds
Microcosm
The Stack
Sumbitch

FRIDAY, 4/15

The Wobblers
Elephante
The Tourists
Field Trip
Arcweld

SATURDAY, 4/16

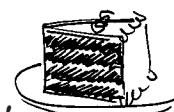
Desdemona
The Pipe Welders Union
The Richard Hedderts
The Adequits
The Flailing Inhalers

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