

some T-shirts for this huge Mexican feast," Chris said. "See, we were trying to find Jimi Hendrix's grave and we got, um, off track."

"Way off track," Colt chimed in.

"Anyway, we rolled into this Mexican restaurant about 10 minutes before they were supposed to close ..." The story continued, with each member of the band adding their part.

That easy exchange and balance between the members is a key element to their relationships. Chris and Colt founded the band in 2000 and have been around the longest. They're the tie-breaking decision makers and the main talkers, but everyone gets their say. "We get along so well because we have the same goals," Colt explained. "It's the way a marriage should be."

"Um yeah, but without the sex," Kenny said. Then, with a grin, he added, "Except that we get to spoon."

## WORKING THE ROLODEX

Every band needs a babysitter once in a while, and for Northwest Royale, it's Brian. He's a former Marine sergeant and you can't see any of these guys balking if he were standing there shouting, "Get your asses in the van." He keeps them on track, gets them places on time and makes sure they've got gigs. "Brian takes really good care of those guys," Marshall said. "He always makes sure they've got something good going on, that they've got tours and shows to do."

Brian does it by doggedly networking with bands and promoters in other markets. He books an out-of-town band to open for Northwest Royale in Eugene and later, Northwest Royale opens for that band in their hometown. "It just keeps building," Brian said. "Just look at the response in the markets they go to. By the fourth or fifth

Because of their ties to Jäger, Northwest Royale has opened for some big names including Slayer, a band that might never consider them under normal circumstances. And according to Mike Thrasher, a Portland-based concert promoter who booked that show and books other major national acts throughout the region, Northwest Royale held their own. This upcoming tour is all Jäger bands, working together to support each other in their individual markets. "The bands that do the best are the ones that go out there and build their following like Northwest Royale has," Grayer said.

But even relentless promotion and networking don't guarantee success. "It's extremely hard for a band to grow beyond a regional level without a record label and a booking agent," Thrasher said. "It makes it hard to go outside of a 100-mile radius of your hometown, and hard to get into larger venues unless the band is opening for another band. And without a label, it's hard to get those supporting slots."

If Northwest Royale just wanted to get a record deal, any record deal, they'd have signed a contract a long time ago. "The odds of getting a record deal are good," Grayer said. "But the odds of survival are not." Northwest Royale is waiting for the right offer. "I'd rather be in Floater right now than the Cherry Poppin' Daddies," Kenny said. "They had one huge hit and now they're back where they were, working their way up."

## MUSICAL CHAIRS

Maybe the biggest question is whether or not Northwest Royale can keep a stable band line-up. Originally founded by Colt and Chris in 2000, six people have either left Northwest Royale or been kicked out. "The line-up changes will destroy the integrity of the band and its fan base," said Buddy America, a local musician who played with

**'I GUESS WHAT IT REALLY COMES DOWN TO IS THAT YOU HAVE TO BE GOOD ENOUGH TO QUIT YOUR DAY JOB.'**

—EVIN MARSHALL

show, people go just to see them. The first time 15 people come. They tell their friends. Then 50 show up."

Brian is the best local manager Nielsen has seen in Eugene. "He takes it very seriously," he said. "Brian's very organized. He follows up on phone calls. And any time I need something, I don't have to worry about it getting done."

Another thing helping the band is sponsorship by Jägermeister. Northwest Royale is one of about 200 bands nationwide sponsored under the Jäger Music Program. Adam Grayer, Jäger's marketing and band coordinator, said they look for hardworking bands that are big fans of the licorice-flavored alcohol, then give them Jäger T-shirts, customized shot glasses, lighters, band T-shirts with the Jägermeister logo on them, posters and other schwag. "Metal is one of the bigger genres we work with," he said.

Long before Chris knew about the Jägermeister music program, he had the word "Jägermeister" tattooed on his forearm and Colt had the logo with the stag inked onto his left bicep. "When a band shows that kind of devotion to our product, it's a no-brainer," Grayer said.

Northwest Royale from 2001 to 2002.

But to folks who know music in Eugene, the explanation for the high turnover rate is simple: "Those guys are really serious about what they do and they work their asses off," said a WOW Hall employee. "Most musicians in Eugene simply don't want to work that hard."

The band had the same four members from 2003 until just a few weeks ago when Blake announced he was leaving. "It was like he dropped this bomb on us," Kenny said. "I mean, we didn't want him to go." While the loss of a core member was a blow to the band, Chris added that he felt Blake did the right thing if he wasn't ready or willing to take this next big step with them.

In the meantime, they "promoted" Ethan, who used to be their roadie, into the band, a move some view as strange since he has no musical training. With wild, dark brown hair that escapes from underneath his baseball hat in a curly mop, you're more likely to see Ethan macking on a fan than loading amps these days. At a party after a show back in April (when he was still just the roadie), Ethan was standing in the kitchen flirting, then making out with a girl he'd picked up at

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