

A UNIVERSITY SET ON A HILL

The potential for a vibrant Logan downtown goes unfulfilled as students continue to stay away from local businesses

By: Megan Nielsen



LOGAN, Utah -- It's a Friday night and local musician Taylor Garner is playing a concert at one of Logan's local music venues, WhySound.

Everyone is sitting in the back. No one is standing up to dance. No one is up next to the stage. "It's hard to have a lot of energy and a lot of good vibes when you don't feel like the audience is really vibing with you," Garner said.

"It feels like a lot of people have been here for a while and still don't know about WhySound," said Aaron Cardiel, the owner of WhySound.

There's a disconnect that exists between Utah State University students and Logan's downtown scene that people are hoping to mend.

Aubrey Parker, a sophomore at USU, said she was a music fan but had never heard of or been to a show at WhySound or The Cache Venue, another music venue in downtown Logan.

Parker said she'll drive down to Salt Lake for concerts if it's a band she really likes.

"The biggest thing to note as far as the music scene in Logan and community on campus is that it's always ebbing and flowing," said Taylor Ross Wilson, a co-owner of WhySound and former Utah State student. "Every year is a new year and every year has totally different kids. One of the biggest struggles of having a really solid local music scene here is that kids will come and start up a band and then two years later they're gone and their entire following is gone."

"A lot of the students that live up here go home every weekend and it kind of deserts the place," said Jeremy Jensen, a multimedia specialist in Utah State's PR and marketing department.

"I don't know who to blame," Jensen said.

Parker said she primarily attends campus events because they're accessible and free.

"A big part of it is simply the campus lifestyle," Wilson said. "I was doing house concerts in my dorm room the first week I was up here but it took me about a month before I even found out about WhySound or any of the local community."

Wilson said the local scene wasn't presenting itself and there was nobody saying "come to WhySound."

Students have meal plans and campus provides a lot of entertainment so students don't even have to leave campus, Wilson said.

Maia Olpin, a Utah State freshman, said university events are a big draw because they're close and convenient.

"I honestly feel like if Logan were flat and the university and downtown were on the same plane there would be more connection," said Mark Lunt, the owner of The Cache Venue and board member for the Logan Downtown Alliance. "But there's something metaphorically different because the university is up on the hill and the city is down here."

Wilson said WhySound is trying to do more stuff with campus to get the students involved. "We're trying to work more with Aggie Radio and work more with campus clubs and organizations," he said. "They already have those connections on campus."

Olpin said she's made it to a lot of activities on campus but she's also excited to get to know downtown Logan. "Supporting local businesses is important to me," she said.

She's only been here for a week and already has done her best to take advantage of the local Logan scene. She's made it out to Caffe Ibis to enjoy the "cute coffee shop environment," taken some yoga classes at a local studio and walked the town as local businesses came out for Taste of Logan.

"Towns with vibrant downtowns typically have three things going on," Lunt said. Those things are coffee shops, breweries and live music.

"Logan isn't different," Lunt said, "Framing shops and title loan companies aren't going to make us happening. We probably need those same ingredients as every other vibrant town."

"A lot of the people that own the majority of downtown have these businesses that take advantage of big purchases one time but don't create an atmosphere that's welcoming to people to come hang out and spend time downtown," Jensen said.

Nicole Kirby, a junior at USU, said she goes to downtown Logan occasionally to eat at Bluebird Cafe or Center Street Grill. "That's about it," she said.

"Downtown just needs a kick in the pants," Lunt said.

And that kick might finally be coming.

The Crepery, The Waffle Iron, Even Stevens, Lucky Slice Pizza, West Side Coffee Company and Stacked are all eateries Lunt said have helped Logan's downtown. College kids like to eat.

Garner said he thinks having more bars or a liquor license at WhySound could help get students downtown. "Something to draw them there besides knowing the band," he said.

Garner's favorite night of touring with the band He is We came in 2018. It was a Tuesday night in Columbus, Ohio. The room was packed and the crowd sang every song at the top of their lungs. No one cared who was next to them, they were just there to enjoy the music.

College students from Ohio State University flocked to local venue Rumba Café, excited to be a part of the music and a part of the town. "This is what I imagine WhySound being like," Garner said.