

The Blockhouse Bar

Where Everything Goes!

by Paul Bickley

When David T James rented a space in the basement of a former VFW post in 2014, he wasn't thinking about opening a bar. He and some friends were looking for a place to record music and host occasional gigs with other local musicians. Over time, the shows became more frequent. "It made sense to pivot towards a full-time bar and venue," says James, so in 2017, he opened the Blockhouse Bar in the underground cement-block space.

James says the Blockhouse—at 205 South College—has hosted over 1,200 events since those early years: country, jazz, hip-hop, rock, punk, metal, and blues shows, and non-music events like improv, comedy, poetry readings, plays, and film screenings.

The current weekly lineup begins on Tuesdays with an open mic from

6:30 to 8 p.m. Then the Blockhouse Tonk Band performs country, rock, and songwriter classics from 8:30–11 p.m. Wednesday is jazz night, curated by trumpeter John Raymond, an Indiana University Jacobs School of Music professor of jazz studies, featuring touring or local musicians that include Jacobs professors and students.

Thursdays and Fridays feature rotating monthly events at the Blockhouse: local and touring musicians, DJs, comedy, improv, film screening, salsa nights, and game nights. Current monthly events



Blockhouse Bar owner and general manager David James.
Photo by Paul Baechtold

include Gallow Dance (goth and dark-wave music), Record Church (vinyl DJ night), and bingo.

On Saturdays, the Blockhouse hosts two or three local and touring acts from 7–10:30 p.m. Then the bar pulls out the karaoke machine until 2 a.m.

Performers with international acclaim, such as Durand Jones & the Indications, Mitzki, and Weyes Blood, have performed there.

"We aim to provide a space for a variety of tastes," says James, a multi-genre guitarist, pianist, singer, and songwriter, who sometimes performs with the bands.

Bloomington resident Chaz Mottinger, something of a Blockhouse regular, says, "What I really love about the place is the organic, true-to-Bloomington way the bar began and continues to operate, and the variety of shows. There's always a diverse crowd, too. It feels cozy and intimate but also worldly."

In addition to serving up entertainment, Blockhouse also serves domestic and craft beers, hard seltzers, and non-alcoholic beverages.

Says James, "We've been fortunate to have great people on both sides of the bar and stage make the Blockhouse what it has become."

Visit blockhousebar.com.