

Club Profile: The Back Bar

Location: 1901 Beloit Avenue (at Kellog), Janesville, WI 53548 608-741-0001 608-751-2201 Bookings
Capacity: 550
Description: Huge stage and bar area. Originally located behind a bowling area, which is where the Back Bar gets its name.
Genres: Strictly Hard Rock and Metal. Prefer a 50/50 originals-covers blend
Live Music: Every Friday and Saturday plus special events.
Sound/Lights: Full P.A. and exceptional lighting system are provided. Soundman and Lightman are also provided.
Terms: Negotiable
Submissions: Basic press kit with CD
Contact: Bob Kerman bob@thebackbar.com

By *Caterson Damon*

Photos by *Bob Kerwin*

In the late 70s to mid 90s, there was a bar in Janesville that seemed to have a lot of the hot live acts, like Atomic Angel, Playgrind, Blu Steel and many others. It was stuffy and the smoke was so thick you could barely see your hands, but we didn't care. We were regulars checking out the hottest metal and rock in Wisconsin. This club was called the Back Bar and it's back.

As the 90s melded into grunge rock, the Back Bar became a place of less interest to live music fans. The whole idea of playing the flashy rock star was replaced by the concept of an average, flannel-clad guy who delivers pizza or works at a gas station. The new music trends and karaoke bars just couldn't hold a candle to the previous metal and rock acts that lit up the night at the Back Bar, and eventually the club went through some ownership changes and some pretty questionable names, like Champions, Danger Zone, and Extreme Nights.

Recently metal and hard rock began creeping back into the picture and people wanted the Back Bar back. Bob Kerman knew this and he rolled the dice with perfect results. He and his wife Diane Kerman, who also own Bobbleheads Sports Bar & Grill and JVLNET Internet Services, are the new owners.

"This venue was built over thirty years ago," says Bob Kerman. "The 6,000-square-foot structure was originally built around 1950 as a cattle auction barn. It's solid as rock with heavy lumber and works well as a live music venue. The stage has a 25-foot raised ceiling and there is a 1,000-square-foot backstage area. My love for hard rock and light metal live music made it a natural business decision for me. I like to see live music as often as possible. It just made perfect sense to bring the Back Bar back when



we did. When we bought it in September of 2003 it had been run as a trendy nightclub with DJ music. Within a year, we had started to restore the venue back to its live music roots. The PA was completely updated by Jon Hoover and the light system updated by Dan Buehl, both veterans of the Back Bar."

In December of 2004, the name was changed to Bob & Diane's The Back Bar and they started by hosting live bands every Friday, eventually opening the doors Saturday nights as well. The money and effort the Kermans have put into this place has really paid off. The paint, the ventilation, and even the bathrooms have been redone to please the customers.

"Bob does the bookings," Diane explains. "It's a full-time job, a balance between booking local bands with raw talent and a good following and regional and national touring bands that want to play at a live venue in a small-

er town. There is really a limited number of venues a touring band can play in south-central Wisconsin that has its own PA, lights, sound and light men, holds 500 people, serves alcohol and allows smoking."

"I am booking bands as far out as ten months and always fine-tuning the schedule to please the patrons," Bob adds. "I originally thought that we could book any type band and the customers would come. Not so. We did a survey in May and our customers were listening to WJJO more than any other station. They want to party! So we stopped booking classic rock and 70s tribute bands, and started booking hard rock and light metal bands. A lot of local musicians come out to see the touring bands. That is what the Back Bar is about, too: It's a place for musicians to hang out. It's just as much their club as it is ours. It's all about treating every band well and making them feel at home."

The Back Bar posts pictures of every band that plays on its website (www.thebackbar.com). They also turn on a live webcam every Friday and Saturday so anyone can see and hear the band from the Internet. The website is getting thousands of hits each month and lists the current schedule, making it easy to see who is playing and when.

Bob and Diane personally invite you to the Back Bar. You can join their email list and get a reminder of who is playing each weekend. You will also get a secret password to get \$2 off the cover each night that weekend. This month they'll be throwing a couple of Halloween extravaganzas. On Saturday, October 29th it's a three-band costume party with Mid-Life Crisis, Bellevue Suite and Vintage Burning. Beginning at 3 p.m. on Sunday the 30th, a six-band metal fest will feature Vintage Burning, Fatal Agenda, Supernatural, Blacklist and Fogcrawler. There will be a magician on hand and freak shows between acts in which contestants can win cash and prizes.



Left top: Bob Kerman Left Bottom: Bartender staff: Amy, Diane Kerman, Lynnea and Renee Above: Dragenfly rock the house under the spectacular lighting rig