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A Warped Rocker: Marist High School senior-to-be lands a gig with famed summer rock 'n' roll tour

By Carolyn Lamberson
The Register-Guard

At many summer camps, the highlight is the sing-along on the last night, complete with a campfire, s'mores and teary goodbyes with your new best friends.

For Eugene's Libby Fenstermacher, that final sing-along has a new meaning. Instead of sitting around a fire, she'll get to sing on this summer's Warped Tour.

She is one of 23 attendees from the Ethos Music Camp in Chico, Calif., who auditioned to perform three dates in what is considered to be the biggest rock festival tour in the nation this summer. Their first gig is Thursday at the Coors Amphitheatre in San Diego. On Friday, they'll play at Cal State Long Beach. And their final stop will be Saturday at Pier 30 & 32 in San Francisco.

"I'm so excited," the 17-year-old Fenstermacher said earlier this month before heading to Chico for the first week of camp.

She and her fellow young musicians at Ethos will perform on one of the festival's side stages, this one sponsored by guitar string company Ernie Ball. The 23 Ethos musicians have been divided into six bands; each band will get to perform an original song.

The Ethos Music Camp is a rock/pop camp in its sixth year. It's loosely affiliated with California State University at Chico, assistant director Scott

Libby Fenstermacher



Libby Fenstermacher, 17, will be living her rock 'n' roll dream when she sings with her band during three stops on the Warped Tour this summer in California.

Photo: **Kevin Clark** / The Register-Guard

Cummings said. It's open to young musicians ages 12 to 18. The first week of camp focuses on performance, the second on recording. The third week - the jaunt on the Warped Tour - is new this year, Cummings said, and admission is by audition only.

Camp attendees are divided up into bands. Each band will write a song during the first week of camp, record it the second week and take it on tour the third week, Cummings said. Delving into both the music and the business side of the industry, the camp aims to teach kids the "blunt truth," he added.

"We're a lot more realistic than other camps," he said. "The others it seems are geared more toward like a fantasy camp."

Fenstermacher, who will begin her senior year at Marist High School in September, attended camp for the first time last year. She was blown away, she said.

"Ethos really, really inspired me, just going there, realizing that I could do this, everyone really liking what I was doing," she said. "So I came back home, and I joined choir and just did all this music stuff."

Her parents, Bob and Cathy Fenstermacher, also noticed their daughter taking music more seriously.

"It gave her a lot more confidence," Bob Fenstermacher said. "It really cemented her desire to go in the rock direction. That's really when she started getting into taking more formal voice lessons."

It helped her start writing music, he added. She also came home and wanted to join a band. And it really made her want to return to Ethos this year.

"It changed her quite a lot," her dad said.

His daughter agreed. "It was the best experience I've ever had in my life. It's amazing."

For her audition tape, Fenstermacher rounded up some friends and recorded a cover of Pat Benatar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot."

Ethos' Cummings said the judges considered a number of criteria when picking the lucky Warped few, including talent and stage presence. He didn't see Fenstermacher's audition tape, but was familiar with her skills from last year.

"She's a really strong singer," he said.

Fenstermacher said she's been singing forever, mostly in school. But it's only been in recent years that she really got into rock 'n' roll. In the past couple of months, she joined a

local rock band, called Elysium Avenue, and recorded a demo.

"I always wanted a band," she said. "Now I have one, and it's really cool. Everything is happening for me this year in music. It's really weird that all my dreams are coming true earlier than I wanted them to."

She calls her musical tastes eclectic. She loves emo and indie rock. And James Taylor and jazz. Her current favorite bands include the Used, Vendetta Red, Taking Back Sunday, Silvertstein and the Rock 'n' Roll Soldiers.

She likes the voice of Amy Lee, the vocalist for Evanescence, but she doesn't pattern her vocal style after anyone.

"I just kind of sound like myself."

For the past two weeks, Fenstermacher has been at camp in Chico. This week, she'll head south to join the Warped Tour, which features dozens of rock bands performing on eight different stages. The young musicians will stay in college dormitories while on the tour, and will be chaperoned, Cummings said, much to the relief of many parents. Fenstermacher's included.

"It clearly is a leap of faith for us. It's very exciting for Libby, and we've been very supportive of her music," Bob Fenstermacher said. "But taking off to San Diego and Los Angeles and San Francisco to do music on the Warped Tour is, like I said, a leap of faith. We did have experience with the Ethos Music Camp last year and really found it to be a high-quality camp with very good supervision."

The younger Fenstermacher is appreciative of her parents' support, both emotional and financial. Tuition for the three weeks of music camp is nearly \$3,000.

"They really support me in music a lot. They put a lot of money and time and effort and all the good parent stuff - love, too - to let me do my music," she said. "My mom doesn't want me to become the stereotypical rock star. I think she's most worried that I'm going to do the whole sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll thing. But I'm definitely not going to do that."

Looking to the future, Fenstermacher said she'd love to be in a band and do the whole music and touring thing for a while. She also can see herself working on the business side of the industry. Or maybe she will become an elementary school music teacher, inspired in part by her own teacher, Jim Reinking.

"He's been a big inspiration to me," she said.

In the meantime, she's looking forward to possibly meeting some of her rock idols in Southern California.

"I'm really excited to see Hawthorne Heights, and My Chemical Romance I really want to see. I really want to see Underoath and Silverstein," she said.

"I really want to eat breakfast with somebody. That would be so cool."

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