



The Music Space of Owatonna is located at 216 N Cedar Avenue, Owatonna.

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Mark Woodrich dreamed of owning a music store for years before he opened The Music Space of Owatonna in 2019. The Space is a multi-use entertainment venue that includes a record store and a place to sit and enjoy music. But it wasn't long after Woodrich opened that he had to close both his concert venue and his retail store in the wake of COVID-19. Reopened since June, he said the retail store has less potential business because of his inability to host concerts and music performances at full capacity. Also, the selection of performers is reduced because few big-name performers want to come to Owatonna when there aren't enough sizable venues around to make the tour worthwhile.

"I have had to bring in more new music inventory and products to try to stimulate more sales and revenue," Woodrich said. "And I'm challenged by figuring out how I have to change much of my business plan for the venue and find new or creative ways to present some kind of live music and entertainment or create new revenue."

Woodrich said that the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism has helped him "in so many ways" during the pandemic.

"[They helped] financially, emotionally, supplies, marketing," he said. "I probably could not have survived or had motivation to carry on without Owatonna Chamber support."

After receiving a Jump

Start Owatonna grant from the Chamber, Woodrich was able to purchase safety items and supplies for his store, stage and venue, as well as outdoor lighting to allow for more socially distanced outdoor events into the fall. He also used some of the funds to purchase a high-quality video projector, which will allow him to livestream concerts of musicians who aren't able to come to Owatonna.

For Woodrich, though, the biggest project was doubling the size of his stage, based on COVID-19 social distancing rules. Jump Start Owatonna facilitated a donation of stage pieces from the Wenger Corporation, which would have cost the full amount of Woodrich's grant if he had to purchase the materials himself.

Looking forward, Woodrich said the situation is still uncertain for the live entertainment venue business, but he's hopeful that The Music Store can still be a home for local music. He already has a weekly local songwriter open mic night, and he's back to hosting live concerts by regional and local musicians out back on the weekends.

"My record store can't survive on its own," he admitted. "I'm lucky to have a stage and other things. Many similar small shops have simply closed their doors. I'm hopeful ... still unsure, but carrying on like an optimistic dreamer with a plan."

by Grace Brandt, special project for the People's Press

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