

Eating with your Rock Heroes

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

For years, a typically American scene was that of the family eating dinner in front of the television. Nowadays, instead of watching the news or a rerun of *M*A*S*H*, they might very well be watching MTV.

Music television's acceptance into our culture has been swift, and countless bars and restaurants have jumped on the bandwagon by casually putting up video screens in a corner. But at least one place has gone even further.

"I just thought that if Rock Heroes could be a well-done, tasteful place with atmosphere and good food, as well as entertainment, that it just might interest people," said Tony Outedo, the owner and creator of Rock Heroes.

After 15 years in the music industry and managing such groups as Foghat and Bob Welch, Outedo moved to Florida. He was restless until, one day, the merging of music videos and a hoagie shop clicked together in his mind.

The result is Rock Heroes, located on University Avenue across from campus in the building formerly occupied by Taco Nacho. It is a combination of hero sandwiches, a bar, and music videos that is subtly unique.

The setup is as follows: you walk in and order your hoagie and drink. Then you go up the stairs while staring at the gold and platinum albums that line the walls. Upstairs, you sit in a booth while along the wall is a series of television screens that constantly show music videos, visible from any seat in the house.

Outedo's idea for a row of TV screens, which is visually striking, came to him when he was in a TV store. He designed the rest of Rock Heroes with the help of Don Puckett, a UF graduate.

"Taco Nacho was in horrible condition, so I'm very proud of the compliments we've gotten from people like architecture students, especially since

we did the whole thing in just six weeks," Outedo said.

Rather than simply hook up to an existing service, such as MTV, Outedo wanted to give his customers something different. So, he buys videos from video pools and makes regular trips to obtain videos from friends and associates in the record industry. This enables Rock Heroes to program its own music and adapt quickly to changing circumstances.



MICHAEL WILSON/APPLAUSE

"I know that if I get a large, rowdy crowd I can go into the back and pull a tape full of party music," he said.

Eventually, Outedo hopes to control his own programming completely. While the focus will always be on music videos, he hopes to be able to throw in some original programming every three or four videos. Some of his ideas include old movie clips, touchdown plays from Gator football games, NASA footage, W.C. Fields skits, etc., etc.

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Basically, Rock Heroes creates a friendly, relaxed atmosphere and tries to be all things to all people.

"People are always asking me, 'Why don't you have a dance floor?'" Outedo said. "I wanted this to be a place where people could come to eat or have a beer with their friends and watch videos for a couple of hours or simply relax between classes or after a night out."

Outedo believes a dance floor would alienate most of the

people who just want to relax or grab a bite to eat.

Rock Heroes has been open for about two months and Outedo said it did fabulous business the first week and went on to double that the next three weeks — though most people still don't know about the place.

He hasn't done a lot of advertising, probably because they opened at such a bad time. Rock Heroes was open only two weeks when Thanksgiving break arrived. Then, another few weeks later it had to endure Christmas break. So, Outedo doesn't expect Rock Heroes to hit

its stride until mid-January.

When asked if he would syndicate Rock Heroes, like McDonald's, if it is a success, Outedo smiled and admitted to a bit of planning in that area.

"The last thing I want is to be 90 days down the road with a raving success and have to kick myself for not planning ahead," he said.

In the future, he hopes to broaden the menu to include homemade soup, chili, and hot sandwiches. The videos, he noted, are getting better and better every day. So, Tony Outedo is certain that videos and Rock Heroes are here to stay. ■