



River Bend Records Now Open In Godfrey, Has Huge Collection Of Old School Vinyl Records, Hopes To Expand In Future

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
December 16 2020 3:00 PM



GODFREY - The past decade has seen a resurgence in vinyl records, as many current artists have put their most recent releases on vinyl, along with compact discs, and more recently digital downloads on streaming services such as Pandora, Spotify, and other services.

At the newly-opened River Bend Records in Godfrey, the vast majority of music is offered on vinyl, as the store has a vast collection of music from all genres from the 50s through today. The new store has gotten off to a great start among music collectors around the area.

"Things have been going really well," said Billy Hurst, who co-owns the store along with his wife, Tara. "Really, really busy, You know, we've been here about six weeks, and the response from the general public has been just amazing. So supportive."

The fact that vinyl records are making a comeback is something the Hurst feels has been coming for some time.

"It's been probably about 10 years in the making," Hurst said, "a second wave or resurgence of sorts. In the last two years, vinyl's actually outsold CDs. So yeah, very, very cool."

Vinyl records have long been a staple of disc jockeys in hip-hop and rap acts, as the DJs play and scratch records as part of the songs, but now, many younger people are discovering the music of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, when vinyl records were the norm, and Hurst feels that it's indeed a good sign for the revival of vinyl.

"Oh yeah, they never stopped using it," Hurst said about the hip-hop artists who still use vinyl today. "Plus the fact that you've got kids 17-25 that are discovering vinyl records for the first time. They are kind of not only rediscovering, but discovering bands like Journey, or Billy Joel, or Elton John, Boston, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Fleetwood Mac, all those great bands that we grew up with, and they're just now enjoying for the first time on vinyl."

In fact, the current generation of younger people has started to listen to the music of artists from the 60s and 70s, as well as listening to the current acts of the day, which bodes well for music from all eras.

"What's crazy though is we'll actually see kids that'll be purchasing a Beach Boys record, or a Rolling Stones record," Hurst said, "right alongside Black Veiled Brides, or Tyler the Creator or Ariana Grande. They're buying everything literally, you know, from new to old."

Hurst has collected music in all forms for many years, and also has a background in sports photography, and both have helped him in opening his business.

"I've been a collector for over 30 years," Hurst said, "so 33 years myself, since I've been collecting vinyl since I was 13, and any other physical form of music; cassettes, then I moved right on to CDs, but never stopped loving vinyl. I even collect 8-tracks," he said with a laugh.

"But I've been a collector forever, and as a photographer, I'm a sports photographer by trade. I shoot Little Leagues, high school, the Cardinals, the Blues, Mizzou, Illinois, Ohio State, I shoot everything. As a matter of fact, I was down in spring training on March 14, when everything kind of stopped due to COVID, was sent home, and we haven't worked really since. I shot 20 Cardinal baseball games this year, but as far as the Little League, it came to a screeching halt. None of the Little Leagues around here even played, and still aren't playing, high schools mostly aren't playing, so I had to kind of think this was going to be my long-term, kind of retirement plan was to open a record store, and kind of do something that I enjoy. But COVID kind of put that into hyperspeed, so to speak.

"This location became available; Black's Sporting Goods was here in this location for 43 years prior to this spot becoming available in the spring when they moved. And, kind of the stars aligned. I wasn't working, I needed to find a way to earn a living, and this spot became available, so what better chance than now?"

Since the store's opening, Hurst has made sure that he and the store have followed all regulations and guidelines for the COVID-19 Pandemic, but he's also very optimistic that things will return to some sort of normality soon.

"We basically only opened up Oct. 24," Hurst said, "so we've only been open for six weeks, so we know nothing other than COVID. Ever since we've opened, we've had to adhere to all the policies and rules and regulations, limiting people in here, requiring masks, requiring hand sanitizers and social distancing, taking every necessary precaution to keep everybody safe. So we know no other way at this point.

"But there is a light at the end of the tunnel," Hurst continued, "we're going to get through this, and the good news is that since we've been here, in the short time that we've been here, we've been just overly enthused as to how the general public has perceived it. We've been super busy, everybody's excited, they love the idea that they can come in, they can browse, they can listen to the music, they can talk to people that have similar interests, and they can walk out with records that they love."

For comparison, River Bend Records is a bit like the largest store of its kind in the St. Louis area, Vintage Vinyl, which is open in the University City Loop area of St. Louis, on the site of the old Varsity theater, which was the best known in St. Louis with midnight showings of The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Three Stooges marathons on the weekends.

"Absolutely," Hurst said. "We're a little bit smaller scale than Vintage Vinyl, but when it boils down to it, we're a little over 3,000 square feet here, we have about 15,000 records. So I'd say we're pretty large for a record store."

Hurst also had very kind words for Tom "Papa" Ray, the owner of Vintage Vinyl, a veteran and still popular figure in the St. Louis music scene, and host of a very popular radio show, Soul Selector, Monday afternoons on KDHX-FM.

"Absolutely," Hurst said with a smile. "That guy has been around forever, he knows everybody, everybody knows him, and not only to be able to be actively involved in a record store, but in the music business as well, running labels and having bands and things that are on their label. It's pretty exciting."

Hurst also has a vast music background, having lived in Nashville during the mid to late 90s and being part of its music scene as well.

"That was about a half-a-lifetime ago," Hurst said with a laugh and smile, "20-plus years ago. But yeah, I ended up going to Nashville in the mid-90s, and made a couple of records, had a deal down there, made a couple of records in the mid-90s and early 2000s. So yeah, 90s country was my thing. We were down there for almost 10 years, and it was a fun scene. I was maybe in the right place, wrong time for my kind of music. My kind of music at the time, looking back on now, is still very much along the lines of a Charlie Daniels meets Hank (Williams) Jr., Travis Tritt. A little more outlaw-type country. But I think in the mid-to-late-90s, the females were dominating country radio. This was before Montgomery Gentry or Big and Rich, and when those guys come around. I think if I had been down there five years later, it might have been a little bit different story. But year, we had fun, sold a few records, and played a few shows. Now I'm back here, selling a few more records, but they're just not mine," he said with another hearty laugh.

Hurst has very fond memories of the Nashville music scene, both the glamorous side and the music that was made off the beaten path as well.

"If you can't find something to keep you entertained when you're in Nashville," Hurst said, "and I'm not talking about on the bright lights, big city strip, I'm talking back alley.

That's where the best music is located. You go down in some back alleys, downstairs, and you'll find the really great guys playing down there. Not that there are some extremely talented people on Broadway playing, but that's kind of where all the tourist traps are. The Nashville music scene, the only thing that I've seen that is even remotely close is Austin (Texas). Being down in Austin at certain times of the year, there's some unbelievable music down there in Austin."

Austin is the home of the annual SouthxSouthwest music festival, and its eclectic scene and progressive attitudes helped coin the phrase Keep Austin Weird. It's a scene that Hurst wholeheartedly agrees with.

"Yeah, but it's great," Hurst said with another smile. "The stuff you'll hear, from Grateful Dead to Willie Nelson, it's great."

Now that Hurst is back in Alton, he's got some great plans and big dreams for his store.

"Well, we just want to continue to grow our brand, market ourselves and expand ourselves in the area," Hurst said, "let people know we're here. Right now, so many people are just still even unaware that we're here, with us still being a relatively new store. Let people know that we not only sell records, but we sell hardware. Audio gear from CD players, to speakers, to turntables, cassette decks, both new and used. Right now, it's been kind of tough with COVID, keeping manufacturing kind of shut down a little bit. It's hard for the brand-new stuff to get in stock for us to keep it in stock, because once we get it, it's gone. So we're relying on a lot of the used stuff to come through the door. So we do buy, sell and trade, we're constantly buying used records as well as used gear and cassettes."

Hurst hopes that River Bend Records becomes a force in the Metro-East scene, and become a destination record store for people in the area.

"Oh year, absolutely," Hurst said. "There's probably three record stores here on the East Side, and there's maybe another half a dozen or so over in St. Louis. So yeah, the metro area, we've got less than 10 stores. But the good news is that the customers, it gives them just a little bit more variety. The more stores, the better as far as I'm concerned. Everybody has different tastes. One thing we understood going in is you can't be everything to everybody, but what we do, we do extremely well."

Although the store's been open for six weeks, Hurst is very optimistic about River Bend Records' future.

"Oh, absolutely," Hurst said. "We can't be any more excited about the way this thing has went, and looking forward to, when we come out of this COVID, we get a vaccine and everybody's back to "normal," it's going to fun, it's going to be exciting."

River Bend Records is located at 2720 Grovelin, Suite B in Godfrey, next door to the Mister Donut shop, and its store hours are 10 a.m-7 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 11 a.m-5 p.m. on Sunday. The store's website is still in development and will be running soon, where customers can order records, equipment, and the store's apparel line, which consists of T-shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies, and other clothing. The store also has a strong presence on social media, and customers are invited to follow the store on its Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, as well as subscribe to its YouTube channel for more information.