

Joshua Finch Feature

Chris Lucia

Most nights, downtown Eugene bar-hoppers can expect to run into Joshua Finch. If he's not sitting at a stool running the door at the Level-Up Barcade, he's usually downtown supporting the local arts and entertainment scene.

Finch, 29, stands 6 feet 5 inches tall and weighs over 300 pounds. Despite his massive frame, though, he is anything but intimidating. He greets every customer with a genuine, slightly goofy smile and tries to remember everyone he meets by name. Every time Finch has a chance to meet someone new, he sees it as an opportunity to network, he said. That's because he runs *Exiled in Eugene*, a do-it-yourself-style “zine” that focuses on the area's under-the-radar art, music and literature.

“If *Exiled in Eugene* looks like it is all cut and pasted together by hand, that's because it is,” Finch said. “I take all of the art, words and ads and glue them to the master sheets, and we make copies of that. We have very old-school, 'DIY' ethics.”

Finch was not always so committed to the burgeoning downtown Eugene art scene. In fact, it took him several months and a near-death experience to realize that he could serve an important purpose and fill a void in Eugene that had been empty for years.

Finch came to Eugene in May of 2007 by way of Lakeview, a small town in the southeast corner of Oregon with a population of about 4,000 people. He was in town to see one of his favorite bands, the Reverend Horton Heat, when he found out another one of his favorite bands would be playing in Eugene the next night. Frantically, he called his boss to get the day off from work, but was not allowed the time off. Finch was told to show up for work back home the next day, 250 miles away.

“I just kind of thought, 'Screw it,’” Finch said. “I quit my job in Lakeview, and hung around Eugene. I got on Craigslist to find a roommate, and had a place to live the next day.”

Shortly after quitting his old job back home and finding an apartment in Eugene, Finch went downtown and got a position at the Horsehead, a downtown bar, working the door. At the time, he said, he was content to work there and dabble in the local music scene, playing guitar and singing in a few bands. He did this for several months.

Late one night in January of 2009, however, Finch said his life was permanently changed outside of the Horsehead when he was stabbed by a drunk patron. The knife barely missed one of his lungs, and he was taken to the hospital and left in critical condition overnight.

Working security at a bar downtown was a serious job to Finch, and he understood the risks that came with it. Intoxicated people condensed in a small space often leads to trouble. What Finch never expected, though, was to be put in the hospital by someone attempting to kill him while he was trying to restore order during an altercation. He recovered after a few weeks, but was left out

of work in the meantime. Finch said he began to focus on who he was, and if he really could put his talents to work in a meaningful way.

“Being stabbed while working definitely changed my life. I thought to myself, 'Hey, I'm 26 years old and I'm not doing a whole lot with my life,’” Finch said. “I reevaluated myself and concluded that I was already financially uncomfortable and treading water. I might as well get some enjoyment out of it.”

Finch realized, since living in Eugene, that there was really no “ambassador” for the local entertainment scene. Following the stabbing and the subsequent reality check it spurred for Finch, he found that he could be the person local bands go to when trying to promote their music. Because of his job working at one of downtown Eugene's most popular bars, he also knew he could put his social networking to use and keep people informed of what was going on in Eugene.

His first project, *Fatty's Eugene Mixtape* – an affectionate reference to his large frame -- was a compilation CD he put together featuring over 20 local music acts. The artwork was supplied by local artist Stefani Newman. He figured he would help get the word out about her artwork by featuring one of her pieces on the cover of the compilation. Finch said he self-financed the original 100 copies and set out selling them anywhere he could for “a few bucks a piece.”

Fatty's Eugene Mixtape was an immediate success. Such a success, in fact, that Finch quickly pressed 150 more copies just to meet the demand. He took a second job at Venture Data, a local telemarketing firm, just to make sure the project had enough financial backing and went on to press three additional volumes of his compilation, still featuring all-original and local music. In total, he estimates that he sold almost 1,000 copies and gave away a few hundred more. By late summer of 2010, the word was out about Finch, then popularly referred to as “Fatty.” He still wanted to make good on the promise to himself he made while recovering from his stabbing, though; he had to make an even bigger impact on the local entertainment scene.

Finch got to work brainstorming his 'zine, a pocket-sized “magazine” that he copied and folded by hand. He would feature local literature, art and stories about anyone he felt was doing something unique and creative. *Exiled in Eugene* would be his main creative outlet, and he would use it to draw attention to the art from the area.

“Joshua does an excellent job bringing artists together on a local level,” said longtime friend Samuel Harmon. “He has really good ears and eyes for talent. He combines this with his excellent social skills to create a richer local scene.”

Finch was able to garner enough interest in his project to sell ad-space in the 'zine. He used the ads to fund his first 500 copies in the fall of 2010. Since then, he has self-released three more issues, including a successful release this past spring. He has already doubled the amount of copies he prints to 1,000 each issue, and started a blog for *Exiled in Eugene*, where he already has over 400 followers. The 'zine's Facebook profile also has over 900 fans.

Finch has maintained two jobs just to support himself in the past, working full-time between

both, and has considered adding another day job that would add an additional several hours of work per week. He estimates that he spends at least 25 hours a week contributing to *Exiled in Eugene*, but he doesn't mind the time crunch.

“I always feel like there's more I could do to support,” Finch said, reflecting on his commitment to the local arts.

Finch is a surprisingly modest person, considering how popular he is. The people who know him best, however, aren't afraid to reward his commitment to local entertainment with high praise.

“Joshua is like a big teddy bear, you just want to snuggle up next to the guy,” Harmon said. “The bottom line is this: the dude is pretty cool.”