

UM-Flint theater students to tell the story of "The Local"

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Ryan Garza | MLive.com Andrew Morton, a theater teacher at the University of Michigan-Flint, is having his class write a play that tells the story of the all-ages music venue, the Local 432.

FLINT, Michigan--University of Michigan-Flint senior Nick Hale never went to the Local 432, an all-ages concert venue that had several homes in downtown Flint, but he and his classmates are ready to tell the Local's story.

Hale, a theater major, is part of a play-writing class at the university researching the history of the Local. By interviewing former Local regulars they're collaboratively writing a fictional script that will take audience members through the history of the Local and what it meant to be a part of the downtown music scene.

"Right now we're interested in telling one specific story with some specific characters in mind. Essentially, we just want to tell a story that parallels the journey the Local's been through, moving around a bit, facing some turbulence, and ultimately reopening and bringing good things to Flint," Hale said.

Andrew Morton, 29, who's teaching the class, said he was partly inspired to do a story about the Local because of its projected reopening as part of Red Ink Flint. Having gone to shows at the Local as a teenager, he said he remembers it as a place where everybody could come and feel welcome.

Last year he had his class write a play based on the string of arsons in Flint, and said this year he wanted to do something a little different.

"I was thinking about something more light-hearted, in a sense, something that celebrates something good about Flint, and I certainly think the Local is an example of that," he said.

The Local 432 originally opened at 432 South Saginaw Street, where the Brown Sugar Cafe now sits. Over the next 22 years it would bounce from location to location throughout downtown until finally closing its doors. Joel Rash, who ran the local, is now heading up the effort to bring the

Local back as part of Red Ink Flint.

Construction on the new facility, located at 124 West First Street, is [expected to be completed](#) sometime in the spring. In April, the class hopes to perform their play there.

The students are building their characters based off of interviews with former local regulars. At this point, they're still interviewing and trying to come up with a storyline they'll all piece together.

For many of the students it's their first experience writing a play.

"I think my favorite experience so far was last week when we were able to take home the pieces and I was able to experience what a collaborative piece would be like," sophomore Michelle Hathaway said. "I had a lot of fun making the backstory for one of the people I was looking at."

Morton said a collaborative project, where students are constantly changing and editing each other's writing, can be a "scary experience, but also it's a really good way to become not only a better critique of your own work but also putting your work out there and getting criticism in a supportive way."

"It's terrifying," Hathaway said, laughing.