



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

October 2017

Stop the Madness:

Last week, Syracuse.com posted a story about the [Westcott Ballroom](#) as an emerging underground music venue in the off-campus neighborhood near Syracuse University. Just the title alone should have people question the legal use of a house basement as a music venue.

[Westcott Ballroom emerges as popular underground music venue in Syracuse](#)

I'm amazed that the publisher at this media outlet would permit an article like this to be published or printed. The article describes an illegal club being operated in a residential neighborhood. Has anyone in this organization read about the Ghost Ship fire in Oakland last year that killed so many young artists from the local music scene. And, there are many more examples of fire tragedies where what

seemed harmless, went terribly wrong.

In Syracuse, the tenant of the house admitted to hosting rock concerts in the house's unfinished basement for more than two years.

According to the article, the landlord also concurred. Soon, *'the bare walls were covered with foil wrapping paper and draped with hundreds of string lights on the ceiling.'* Sound familiar?

Now, you would think that neighbors would



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call the police due to increase in activity or noise at the house.

And, according to the article someone did.

The tenant, who I'm sure is credible, stated that when the police did show up, just advised to "keep it down."

So, is anyone besides me starting to boil yet? Keep reading...it gets better...

"The basement comfortably fits 50 to 100 people. About 120 can squeeze in, at most, as they did for

the Screaming Females show last May." The tenant "charges between \$5 and \$10 at the door, depending on how big the show is."

sell alcohol, but provide a collection of party drinks and accept donations from guests."

Well, at least it isn't a fraternity party - right?



And it goes on...

"Trained volunteers collect money, assist the bands and keep the peace." The tenant reports that "they don't

"This is not a party frat house," he said. "It's a very laid-back setting. People are very respectful because they know that if there are



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*issues, it's not gonna
happen anymore."*

*appropriately titled
"Shame on You!"*

*incredibly reckless for
allowing the story to be
posted. And that the
writer irresponsibly
invited the public to a
concert in the
basement of a house."*



At least someone
thought this was wrong:
[Syracuse fire chief:](#)
[Westcott Ballroom is a](#)
['death trap':](#)

Chief Paul Linnertz of
the Syracuse Fire
Department wrote a
letter to the editor to
express his outrage, and

He wrote *"that in light
of recent tragedies in
places of assembly, he
found the article*

And, he is right! This
house was not designed
to hold large crowds or
host these events. It
lacked all of the fire
protection and life





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safety systems that would be required in any code being applied in an approved building.

Last year I wrote an article about my 20 years in prevention and campus fire safety and how one tragedy can forge a career.

Unfortunately, we have had more than one in these 20 years. This time, tragedy was

averted because the Syracuse Fire Department acted along with the SPD and the venue was shut down and vacated. Maybe

criminal charges will be filed against the tenant and the owner for risking a potential catastrophe. These events need to stop and we need find ways to raise the awareness of our public (and media) so these venues are recognized as dangerous places to be, and to report it before a tragedy occurs.

More dangerous venues - Halloween!

Don't forget Halloween Season is upon us. Be on the lookout for theme parties, public

haunted houses and extreme decorating with combustible or flammable materials.

Don't think it isn't occurring in your community. Maybe the media will tip us off to where these are located, too.

Photos courtesy of www.syracuse.com

Tim

Tim Knisely is on the Board of Directors for The Center and the Senior Fire Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration in State College, PA.

In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all



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existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

Tim has been active with The Center for Campus Fire Safety since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010.

He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the Fire-Wise Campus program and served as project manager for Campus Fire Data.



Published by The Center for Campus Fire Safety.

www.campusfiresafety.org

978.961.0410 | [email](#)