

Sunday, April 15, 2007 6:09 AM CDT

Protesting to the beat

By AMIE STEFFEN, Courier Staff Writer

CEDAR FALLS --- To be sure, Saturday afternoon's event at The Reverb was a protest --- against the Iraq war, against excessive Pentagon spending, in support of action on the issue of climate change. But unlike many protests, it also was a cause for celebration.



For those reasons, dozens of people came to the "Make Hip-Hop, Not War" event in Cedar Falls, largely because of their stance on the issues but also to see national performers and speakers come together, free of charge.

The music brought Holly Kuhn and Jason Wegter, both of Waterloo, to The Reverb. But they also came because they believe the current administration isn't hearing what they have to say.

"Everyone is so apathetic, but this is an example of something getting done," Kuhn said.

She and others signed the Caucus for Priorities Pledge, agreeing to attend the Iowa precinct caucuses and support candidates who advocate for "a significant shift in federal budget priorities."

Chris Schwartz, chairman of Cedar Valley United for Peace & Justice, said the hodgepodge of anti-war-related causes was typical for an event like this. The Step It Up! National Day of Climate Change Action also was promoted. But the pledge was the main thing -- Schwartz said a reduction of 15 percent in the Pentagon's budget, roughly \$60 billion, could help adequately fund social programs like job retraining, health insurance and paying down the national debt.

"I've seen the history of the (Iraq) anti-war movement," Schwartz said. "It seems like more and more young people are speaking out."

So why hip-hop music?

"We're really trying to activate a younger audience," he said.

Cedar Falls-based rock band 3 Lbs of Love kicked the four-hour show off at 4 p.m. --- though their style wasn't of the hip-hop persuasion.

"It's really free and open here," said bandmember Ryan Pearson of Ankeny. "People really appreciate that."

The Cedar Falls Capoeira Academy also had a demonstration, emphasizing that the martial art of no-contact capoeira is about bringing people together from all social classes in noncompetitive ways.

When they invited audience members into the circle to "play" capoeira, Matt Ollendick was pulled from the crowd. He was grinning from ear to ear when he came back. Just like trying out capoeira for the first time, he said, activism is a way many can challenge the status quo.

"A lot of our community are not open to trying something new," said Ollendick, who is co-chairman of the Waverly Alliance at Wartburg. "These are the things that make an accepting person."

"Make Hip-Hop, Not War" was originally scheduled to be held at Overman Park, but was moved due to the previous week's unpredictable weather.

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