

ANIME TAKES ROOT IN THE GATEWAY CITY

THE OTAKU LIFE IN ST. LOUIS

BY SARA HAYES
OF THE FORUM

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It started with the global phenomenon of Pokémon and has not stopped since. It is in the libraries and the mall and the grocery stores and has taken over the Loop. It likes to take over downtown convention centers several times a year with its costumes and oversized Pocky boxes. Whether Saint Louis wants it or not, the anime takeover is here and looking like it is here to stay.

Anime, in simple terms, is Japanese animation. But try asking an otaku (a devoted fan of anime) what anime is and the response will probably be much more complicated. After all, anime isn't just about the animation. For many, it is a way of living. It influences everything from fashion to friendships, lunches to love lives. There have even been many to write a PhD-level thesis on the subject. The same with manga, which is Japanese comic books.

The anime culture has a strong presence in Saint Louis, especially in the Loop where several shops cater to otaku interests. Star Clipper, a comic books shop, is especially known as a hang-out spot for manga enthusiasts and has been host to several anime-related events over the last couple of years. The Loop has also been host to several 'flash cons'. These are anime conventions that take place for a couple of hours instead of the traditional three day weekend, and encourage fans in cosplay (wearing costumes of their favorite fictional characters) to patronize the local shops.

Saint Louis is also home to several yearly conventions whose focus is on the anime and manga culture. Anime conventions are not like business conventions. A convention is a weekend meet-up for otaku where they can cosplay and take photos of one another, attend panels geared towards their interests, and take part

in events like date auctions, raves, and the occasional zombie tea.

The three best known conventions that take place in town are Anime Saint Louis, Kawakon, and Natsucon, which all manage to bring in a sizeable turnout for the whole weekend. On average, an anime convention can garner up to over a thousand people at one time. It is not a good place for the claustrophobic but it is always fun and a great way to meet fellow geeks.

For proof of otaku a little closer to home, Florissant Valley's campus has its own anime club in the form of Genshiken, named after a fictional anime and manga college club from a manga by the same name. It bills itself as the go-to group for anime in Saint Louis and it certainly is the only one of its kind across the various Saint Louis Community College campuses. They meet every Thursday at 2 pm in the Social Science building, where they proceed to discuss Japanese culture and watch episodes of the latest anime series.

Jen Boyer is a member of Genshiken as well as one of the club officers. Common interests with the club are what initially attracted her to membership with the fellow otaku of Genshiken. Her first exposure to anime came at the age of eight years old, with the fighting anime series Dragon Ball Z. She found herself drawn to it, despite Dragon Ball Z being a shonen series. A shonen is a genre of anime geared towards young boys. There's a lot of Japanese vocabulary when it comes to anime but it doesn't take long to learn.

It means a lot for a club like Genshiken to exist on Florissant Valley's campus to Jen.

“It gives a great opportunity for any student at the school to come and talk about something they love: anime, manga, Japanese fashion,” she says. “Heck,

I've gotten into a talk about food one time.”

Considering there is a fair amount of anime titles based around food, it is more likely than some think.

Genshiken, like most sections of anime fandom, is not just about the anime but about the people who love it. Jen counts meeting new people as the best thing about being a part of Genshiken.

“The club brings various people together,” she says, “and I've gotten exposed to some anime that I probably wouldn't have watched or heard of outside the club.”

It is hard to deny that anime, like many popular interests, brings people together. Whether it's through a convention or a campus club, anime is a unifying experience for all kinds. Otaku are as diverse and numerous as the anime titles they watch. College is the perfect place for anime fans to get together and talk about their favorite shows and characters. Genshiken is just one example of the anime groups currently springing up across the Saint Louis area and they are always looking for new members.

Despite the width and breadth of the subject, anime and manga culture is not totally inaccessible to the average person. The website Anime News Network, the most popular news aggregator for otaku, is a great place to start. Or just ask someone at a local comic book shop or library about it. But if someone really wants to get into the world of anime, it is easy - just talk to a campus otaku, like a member of Genshiken. If there is one common theme among all otaku, young and old, it is that they love talking about their hobby. Just don't call it just a hobby.

FREE COMICS? SAY WHAT?

BY MARCUS MCDANIEL
OF THE FORUM



Photos provided by Star Clipper

With the popularity of comic book movies, some people may be interested in the books these blockbusters were spawned from. So why not stop by a comic shop to pick up a comic for free? That's right, I said free. Every year on the first Saturday of May, comic shops across America give away free comics. On May 5, customers can stop into comic shops like Star Clipper

on Delmar Boulevard or the Fantasy Shop in Florissant on North Lindbergh to grab free loot. A wide variety of comics are there for the picking. You can choose from the big-gun companies like Marvel and DC as well as some of the smaller companies. There's also comics for all ages so there is definitely something for everyone.

The goodies don't just stop

there. At Star Clipper, there will be all day entertainment and special guests. Live bands like Superfun Yeah Yeah Rocketship and many others will play comic theme music. You'll also be treated to superheroes in costume: superheroes like the 1980s Defender of the Universe, Voltron.



Visit Star Clipper in the St. Louis Loop at:
6392 Delmar Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63130
(314)725.9110
Or visit them on the web at:
starclipper.com

ANIME STL

2012 CONVENTION

This year's convention was held April 20-22, at the Gateway Center in Collinsville, IL

Photos by JERIC WATSON



A convention attendee portrays Talim from the video game Soul Calibur 5



A convention attendee portrays an Arrancar from the Anime "Bleach".



A group of convention attendees portray members of Anbu Black Ops from the Anime "Naruto".



Flo Valley student Jeric Watson portrays Kaname Tosen from the Anime "Bleach".



A convention attendee portrays Darth Talon from Star Wars.