

STUDENT LIFE

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STL-Style: wearable St. Louis attitude

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You can buy St. Louis sweats and t-shirts at Union Station—plenty of them. There's the typical "Hard Rock: St. Louis" shirt and countless numbers of Arch-embroidered swag for sale everywhere you turn. If you want to explore campus and the city looking like a tourist, Union Station's got you covered.

But Wash. U. students aren't tourists. If all goes according to plan, we spend four years of our lives here. We learn St. Louis' ins and outs, its highs and lows and we've definitely got that love/hate relationship with the city. The last thing we need is a shirt proclaiming, "My Dad Went to St. Louis, and All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt."

So don't waste your time—for real St. Louis style, one should look to Jeff and Randy Vines. The 27-year-old identical twin brothers are co-founders of STL-Style, a local clothing

company that turns witty, clever and sometimes bold "St. Louisisms" into colorful, eye-catching t-shirts.

STL-Style was born a few years ago when, on a whim of creativity, the brothers decided to make shirts for themselves that advertised St. Louis and would show off their appreciation for their hometown. They never had intentions of turning their idea into a profitable business.

"We've always had an underlying passion for the city," said Randy Vines, who is currently pursuing a Master's degree in American Culture Studies at Wash. U. "We've always stuck up for it." Even through the '90s, he said, a "low time for the city, when everyone was talking about how much it sucked."

Their first shirts were relatively simple. One read "STL" while another bore the ultimate St. Louisism: "Where'd you go to high school?"

The shirts were met with a surprising and overwhelm-



Brothers Jeff and Randy Vines wear their love for St. Louis on their sleeves—literally.

ingly positive response. Friends wanted to know where they could get their own. The brothers realized they had something—and teamed up with friends to create more shirt designs.

"If you go to Union Station, you'll see all these shirts geared at tourists," Vines said. "We wanted edgy, fresh ideas

geared toward natives."

They started out selling shirts when and where they could. They set up stands at city festivals, had a booth at Soulard Market and STL-Style just "grew organically from there," said Vines.

The brothers still come up with the shirt ideas, and a good friend does all the

graphic design work. They've kept the company small and local, employing a good friend in Dogtown to print the shirts, and personally holding onto boxes and boxes of shirts in their houses, waiting to ship them out themselves.

The shirts are sold in the Loop at Fifi's and at Vintage Vinyl—both are locations outside of the city limits. The brothers agreed an emphasis on St. Louis city was important to them, but, as Vines said, "U-City is like an honorary extension" of downtown.

The best place to pick up STL-Style's shirts today, they agree, is on STL-Style.com, where visitors can choose from a number of styles of both men's and women's t-shirts in an array of colors.

Keep in mind when visiting the site that the Vines brothers' creations aren't for the easily offended. Shirts bearing phrases like "Meet me in St. Louis, Bitch," "Saint Fuckin' Louis," and "East St. Louis: Feel the Magic" are just a few of the

offerings.

"They're not so family friendly," said Vines. But that's on purpose. "We wanted to dispel the myth that St. Louis is a very conservative city," he said. "We wanted to show its liberal attitude."

Though it's not yet accurate to say STL-Style has sold thousands of shirts, they have shipped out styles all across the country, and even a few internationally.

"We never would have expected it to come to this," he said. Jeff Vines agreed.

"We're not trying to get rich making t-shirts," he said. "The biggest reward is to walk down the street and see people wearing the shirts and being proud of the city."

Plans are in the works to release new lines of hoodies and women's underwear, promised to be just a bit too much for the faint of heart. Stay tuned.

Oh, and if you were wondering—they went to Parkway North High School.