

# Capitalizing on Our Comics Connection

By Ashley Motia

Superheroes. Crime fighters. Cuddly creatures. Pulp and sci-fi stories. You can find all of this and more at Appleseed Comic Convention at the Grand Wayne Center on Saturday, May 11.

This will be the event's inaugural year, but make no mistake, founder Zack Kruse really knows what he's doing. He lives and breathes comics, penning his own *Mystery Solved!* webcomic in addition to guest spots on various panels and podcasts. And this isn't the first convention he's organized. Comic enthusiasts may remember the somewhat short-lived Summit City Comic Con. That was also Kruse's brainchild, and Appleseed is a continuation of the same mission, just under a different name.

"It started in a lot of different ways," recalled Kruse. "The main philosophy behind Appleseed Comic Convention is a love for the comic book community. Comics are like no other form of entertainment. If you bump into someone you know at a comic shop, you end up talking for 15-20 minutes, maybe even an hour. You just get lost in it. There's this weird connection that fans have, and I wanted to share that with Fort Wayne. If someone walks about with even a tenth of the excitement I have for comics, the event's a success in my mind."

Kruse says the best shows are smaller ones that celebrate the tightly knit community of creators with a curious public. That's why you won't find any barely-celebrities, dealers or marketing gimmicks at Appleseed Comic Con. Kruse keeps the event true to the roots of the comic art by crafting a creator-focused show.

"That's what sets it apart from other shows in the region and even bigger shows further out. I strive to bring the best talent in the Midwest – from Ohio, Michigan, Chicago, wherever – to Fort Wayne where fans can access them, shake their hands, and really talk to them about comics," Kruse said.

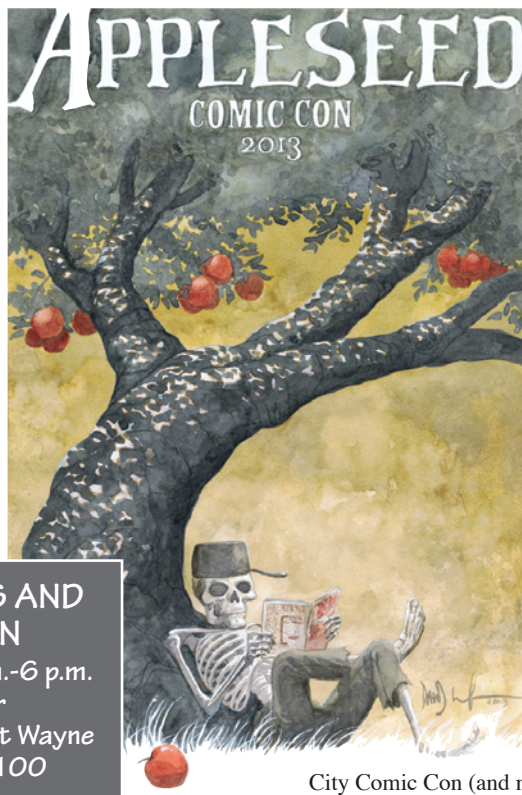
A large part of the Appleseed Comic Con lineup is talent right from our own backyard: Jeremy McFarren (Red Rocket Comics); Tim Baron (*The Life and Times of Julius Destrucutus*); Ben Tiede (The Quad: Comics, Art, Literature and Film podcast); and Aaron Minier, Brandon Peat and Arndt (Black Rose). And that's just to name a handful.

"Fort Wayne is fortunate to have a lot of really talented people here. Appleseed Comic Con is a chance for those artists to show off and introduce themselves to the community," said Kruse. "I don't think people understand that this isn't something new. It's a continuation of a long-term trend."

He's right. Northeast Indiana and the surrounding counties have been home to some real illustration legends. Jim Davis, creator of Garfield, grew up within an hour and a half

drive from Fort Wayne. Deryn Cowan, a prolific artist best known for his work on Milestone Comics, spent some years in Wabash, Indiana. Dwight Graydon "Gray" Morrow was born and raised in Fort Wayne, graduating from North Side. Morrow was a heavy hitter in the Marvel world. He worked on several projects and co-created Marvel's muck-monster Man-Thing and DC Comics' Old West vigilante El Diablo.

"Morrow was just a hometown guy who did all of this incredible work. We have an important history here, and I like building on it and being part of it,"



## APPLESEED COMICS AND ART CONVENTION

Saturday, May 11 • 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Grand Wayne Center

120 W Jefferson Blvd., Fort Wayne

Tix: \$ 10, 260-426-4100

[appleseedcon.com](http://appleseedcon.com)

Kruse said.

"We have such a robust community of artists and supporters in northeast Indiana. There's truly something for everyone. I've been working in comics for nine years, and I'm always amazed by all of the things we have in Fort Wayne that other places don't have."

Kruse's passion for comics has turned him into a walking history book. It's a geek badge he has proudly earned over the years. And it all started with Batman.

"My parents bought me a comic book when I was five years old. I had other comics and stuff, but that was the one that sparked it all. It was a Batman No. 402," he said with a grin. "The image from the cover is seared into my brain. It had two Batmen fighting each other, strangling one other. I remember being a little kid and thinking, 'Oh my God, how could this happen?' I read it over and over and saved it for the longest time until someone finally threw it out."

"Another pivotal moment was when I discovered the work of Steve Ditko. He created everything about Spider-

Man except for the name. When I found his stuff in fifth grade, it changed me forever – and he's still with me to this day. I've presented academic papers at conferences about him. I have a very healthy obsession with his work. I get chills thinking about it."

After he graduated from college in 2004, Kruse cashed in on that passion with a job at Discount Comic Book Service. It was at DCBS that he really honed a deep knowledge of all things comics, climbing the ranks to achieve marketing director status.

In 2009, he helped put on DCBS's tenth anniversary event. That's when the convention bug sank its teeth into Kruse. On a shoestring budget, he brought in a few great artists, placed one small ad and relied on word of mouth for the rest. The event was a hit, and he loved every minute of it.

All the while, Kruse was building an impressive network of comic creators, scholars and fans. It's this network that helped springboard his own comic convention efforts and make Summit

City Comic Con (and now Appleseed Comic Con) a success right from the start.

When you walk into the Grand Wayne Convention Center on May 11, you'll be struck by row after row of comic book artists and writers spanning the genre gamut. It is a show where the creators are the exclusive, and they will be eager to shake your hand and geek out with you.

Kruse said one focus of Appleseed Comic Con was to provide something for everyone. With that in mind, other activities include shopping the several attending vendors (more than previous years), a few discussion panels, a writing workshop, living statue workshop put on in partnership with the Downtown Improvement District, a children's cosplay (costume play) contest and Star Wars characters for photo opportunities.

There's also an exclusive, limited-edition event poster print by Dave Wachter that you'll want to get your hands on. All pre-order tickets receive the print automatically. If you're registering day-of-show, they'll be available for sale at the registration booth. Wachter will be at the convention, available to sign and talk about his artwork.

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