

That Sales man Soupy is still making them laugh

By Shirlee Ross Iden
staff writer

Anyone who was a kid in the 1950s in Michigan probably had lunch with Soupy Sales.

"I became a hero when kids began eating veggies," said Sales, a lanky, salt and pepper-haired comedic star of radio, television, comedy and nightclubs who once reigned as the king of comedy on Detroit television. As one fan from out of the past ventured, "He threw more pies in more faces and did more in the slapstick vein than anyone around in those days."

"But what delighted us fans about Soupy is that he didn't take himself seriously."

Guessimations set the pie-in-the-face number as around 19,000, give or take a few coconut cream or lemon.

Sales, who was born Milton Hines in Franklinton, N.C., said he is always running into parents who were "my kids" way back then.

"I knew all along that half the people liked me and half hated me," he said. Scheduled to play at Joey's Comedy and Sports Emporium in Allen Park Wednesday, Nov. 8 through Saturday, Nov. 11, Sales acknowledged he'll have to be prepared for anything, including the weather.

MILITARY ALWAYS did have a great device for getting rid of snow it's called July," he quipped.

Commenting on Detroit's recent red hot Devil's Night, the comedian said, "I live in New York City where nothing can burn. Here, they're just out mugging and stabbing each other."

While most people believe Sales, a Detroit fixture for so long, was a native, he answers those who ask: "Well, I wasn't born in Detroit, but I died there a couple of times."

Arriving in town as Soupy Hines, his first adjustment came when John Pival, general manager at Channel 7, who discovered him, decided his name might conflict with food products (such as Heins) and dubbed him "Sales."

"In 1957 I legally became Soupy Sales, in court," he said. Sales' fantastic television success in Detroit began in 1953 and lasted about seven years. For a while, he was starred in an unprecedented 11 hours of TV time each week and

reigned as the area's top-rated television personality.

"Once I signed 7,200 autographs in one session," he recalled.

"Lunch with Soupy Sales" was one of his greatest triumphs. Mothers everywhere had to toe the mark, serving up the lunch on Soupy's blackboard if they wanted their kids to eat. A Saturday poontime version was picked up on the ABC-TV network.

SALES GROW UP in Huntington, W. Va. (to be near his mother), where he first became interested in dramatics in high school. He earned a journalism degree at Marshall University and landed a \$20 a week job as a radio script writer at a small Huntington station.

Evenings he would often drive \$0 miles to do his comedy shows for \$15 a night.

"The experience was invaluable," he said.

Diverted by World War II, Sales served in the U.S. Navy and took part in the invasion of Okinawa.

"I found a way to beat the Army," he said. "I joined the Navy."

After scoring as a top-rated disc jockey, he ventured to television and in 1950 his "Soupy's Soda Shop" became the nation's first television teenage dance program.

Sales parlayed his seven years of success in Detroit to a move to the West Coast in 1960. There he built

his "Soupy Sales Show" into LA's No. 1 television offering. Two sons were born to Sales and his wife in California.

Over the years fans have seen the comedian in nightclubs, on game shows and on TV's "Bloopers and Practical Joke" where he has made regular appearances.

ON HIS RETURN to the metro area, he will rehearse a Channel 20 appearance that will mark his dramatic debut on the air in "Monsters" as a guest star.

Five years ago, Sales sold a screenplay to Warner Brothers with a small part written in for himself.

"So far, it's not been done, but I do sell," he said, adding that he still hopes it will be produced.

He also would like to do a situation comedy or his own show again.

"Television should be a great medium for escape and relaxation," he said. "There should be more live programming and amateur show. We've got to give something back. How many news shows can you air?"

"The problem is TV stopped being entertainment when salaried men took over the television business in 1960."

Sales peers back on a colorful career, while looking forward: "What's been wonderful has been that I've done what I wanted to do," he said. "Lots of people get up in the morning to jobs they don't want to go to. I will work anywhere and I love it."



Soupy Sales, once the king of television comedy in the Detroit area, will be back in town for appearances at Joey's Comedy and Sport Emporium in Allen Park this week.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are some listings of comedy clubs in our area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send the information to: **Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric, Newspapers, 36071 Schookcraft, Livonia 48150**

● CHAPLIN'S WEST

Mike Lewis will perform with Tom Pryor and Chris Barnes Tuesday-Saturday, Nov. 7-11, at Chaplin's West, 16390 Telegraph, south of Six Mile, Detroit. For information, call 933-8866.

● MAINSTREET

Jeff Nease will perform Wednesday-Thursday, Nov. 8-9, and Rosie O'Donnell will perform Friday-Saturday, Nov. 10-11, at Mainstreet Comedy Showcase, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. For information, call 995-9030.

● CHAPLIN'S EAST

Greg Travis will perform with Mark Tripp and Joe Jans Wednesday-Saturday, Nov. 8-11, at Chaplin's East, 31244 Groesbeck, Fraser. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 752-1992.

● CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Rick Marotta will perform with Bill Gorge Wednesday-Saturday, Nov. 8-11, at Chaplin's Plymouth in the Plymouth Radisson, 14707 Northville Road, Plymouth. For information, call 454-4680.

● JOEY'S LIVONIA

Ted Holm will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Nov. 8-11, at Joey's Comedy Club, 36071 Plymouth Road, Livonia. Show times are 9 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. For reservations, call 261-0355.

● JOEY'S ALLEN PARK

Soupy Sales will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Nov. 8-11, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sport Emporium, 15246 Southfield and Allen roads, Allen Park. For information, call 382-7041.

● HOLLY HOTEL

Steve Iott will perform along with Steve Bills and Michael Bonner on Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 9-11, at Holly Hotel, 110 Battle Alley, Holly. Show times are 8:30 p.m. with additional 10:30 p.m. shows Friday and Saturday. For information, call 634-1891.

● LOONEY BIN

David Daniel will perform with Eric Champanella and Bill Bauer Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 9-11, at the Wolverine Lounge and Looney Bin Comedy Club, 1655 Gengary, Walled Lake. Show times are 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday and 8 and 10:15 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 669-9374.

● MISS KITTY'S

Ronnie Bullard will perform with Carmen Ciricillo Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 9-11, at Miss Kitty's Comedy Club, Long Branch Restaurant, 595 N. Lapeer Road, Oxford. Show

times are 8 p.m. Thursday, 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 628-6500.

● BEA'S COMEDY KITCHEN

A.J. Jamal will perform with Tim Lilly and Downtown Tony Brown Friday-Saturday, Nov. 10-11, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. For information, call 961-2581.

● LOONEY BIN TOO

Mark Still will perform Friday-Saturday, Nov. 10-11, at the Looney Bin Too at the Roxy, I-94 and Haggarty, Belleville. For reservations, call 699-1829.

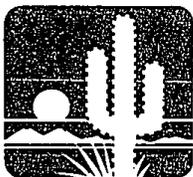
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