

STREET CRACKS

Traffic jams and jokes: Life's twice as 'NIC'

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A four-car pile up or a congested comedy club? Call Stacey Duford. Why? She knows the road to a good laugh.

The traffic reporter on WNIC-FM has pulled up on comedy stages at area clubs, performing the thankless task of emcee.

Emcees set the tone for the night, put the kilowatts into the plug and, generally, warm up the audience. They are, in essence, an alternative to dancing bears and court jesters juggling bananas.

Duford has become quite adept at this emcee business. She years for better, though.

"It's hard to be a good emcee when you're not in the mood to do it," said Duford, 26, who lives in Canton. "The best thing for an emcee is to make everyone in the audience feel like they're part of one big crowd."

She's upbeat, but not to the nauseating extreme of sounding like a cheerleader on a glucose buzz. And with only two years in the business, her humor has a bit of savvy.

Her schtick is one-part topical, four-part observational. She pokes good-natured fun at causes not known for humor.

ON THE RIGHT to Life movement: "The right to livers say that life begins at conception. If that's the case, instead of saying I'm originally from Flint, I'll have to say 'Hi, I'm Stacey. I live in Detroit but I'm originally from the back of a 1959 Ford wagon parked somewhere outside of Duluth.'"

On animal rights: "I'm for animal rights. I don't think they need to

vote."

Her act is clean. "I don't like dirty humor on stage unless it's really clever," she said. "I think very few people can pull that off."

Comedy is something Duford could pull off from the start. Her original creative outlet was acting. She was involved in theater at Albion College, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in English.

She worked as a public relations assistant for Championship Auto Racing Teams in Bloomfield Hills. While taking an acting class at the Southfield Actors Alliance Theatre, one assignment included her doing a three-minute stand up routine.

The class project called for students to perform something they had never done before. For three minutes, she owned the classroom.

A chucklemeister was born. Instructor and classmates alike encouraged Duford to try her luck at a comedy club. She chose an open mike night at Mainstreet in Ann Arbor.

"IT WAS LIKE surgery," she said. "I know I was there, but I don't remember it. I'm pretty sure I was anesthetized."

The audience was lucid with laughter. Owner Kirkland Teeple and others at the club gave Duford a few pointers and she was back for more.

Another regular comedian at Mainstreet, Mike Orenstein, later became her boyfriend. The two comedians have been dating for two years.

"We've traded jokes," Duford said. "Sometimes, we give each other criticisms."

Since her debut, Duford has per-

formed at numerous area clubs and has even ventured outside of the Detroit area to Catch A Rising Star in Chicago, Last Laif at the Rosemont, Ill., and Funny Farm in Louisville, Ky.

So much for her comedy career. What about this other job hovering over streets and freeways? Another odd tale unfolds.

Duford left CART in January 1989 and was scanning classified ads one day. She came across one for a helicopter traffic reporter.

Unusual, Duford thought. Still, she sent a tape of a voice-over to Metro Traffic. She didn't hear anything for awhile.

Then a friend and fellow comedienne, Lisa Golch, brought WNIC-FM morning man Jim Harper to Chaplin's West. Duford just happened to be performing that night. WNIC also had an opening for a traffic reporter.

HARPER APPARENTLY liked what he saw and things have been twirling for Duford since.

"It's a really nice setting for when I think something is funny, I can use it immediately on the air," she said. "Jim and Chris (Edmonds) are good feedback."

With her venture into comedy has come some sobering discoveries. A woman in a male-dominated field still has a rough go of it, Duford said. This holds true despite the successes of comedienne Paula Poundstone, Rita Rudner and Brett Butler.

Duford said she's constantly "hit on" by male audience members. Some have even followed her to her car after shows.

Then there is the overall lack of acceptance that peeves Duford.

"I've been heckled by older men, business men," she said. "They say,



Stacey Duford, the traffic reporter on WNIC-FM, is earning her stage "wings," performing the thankless task of emcee at comedy clubs.

"You suck," before I've even said anything just because I'm a woman. You can't do anything about it."

Stacey Duford will appear Wednesday, Jan. 9, at Yuk Yuk's in the Royal Windsor Hotel, 675

Gopau, south of Wyandotte Street, Windsor. For information, call (519) 971-9999.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are listings of some comedy clubs in our area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send the information to: Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

● CHAPLIN'S EAST

Steve McGraw will appear along with Randy O'Brien and Keith Ruff Tuesday-Saturday, Jan. 8-12, at Chaplin's East, 34244 Groesbeck, Fraser. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 792-1982.

● CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Paul Williams will appear along with Barry Fox Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 9-12, at Chaplin's Plymouth, 14397 Northville. Show times are 8:30 Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 454-4680.

● CHAPLIN'S WEST

Zool Sall will appear with Gavin Jerome and Steve Mitchell Tuesday through Saturday, Jan. 8-12, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph, one block south of Six Mile Road. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 533-8866.

● MAINSTREET

Jim Wiggins will perform Friday-Saturday, Jan. 11-12, at Mainstreet Comedy Showcase, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and 7, 9 and 11 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 996-9080.

● COMEDY CASTLE

Mike Cleary will perform with Jim McClean Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 9-12, at the Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth, Royal Oak. Show time is 7 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 542-9900.

● JOEY'S LIVONIA

Darwin Hines will perform with

Mike Bonner and Ross Amicucci Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 9-12, at Joey's Comedy Club, Plymouth Road between Wayne and Levan roads, Livonia. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 261-0555.

● JOEY'S ALLEN PARK

Norma Zager will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 9-12, at

Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, 15246 Southfield Road, Allen Park. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 382-7041.

● LOONEY BIN

SRO (Something Really Outrageous) and Elliott Branch will perform Friday-Saturday, Jan. 11-12, at the Wolverine and Looney Bin Restaurant and Comedy Club, 1655

Glengary, Walled Lake. Show times are 9 p.m. Friday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. Wednesday and Thursday shows are free. For more information, call 669-9374.

● DUFFY'S

Bob Posch Comedy Show will perform at 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays at Duffy's, 8635 Cooley Lake Road, Union Lake. Admission is \$7. For information, call 363-9469.

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DEARBORN (At Fairlane Center) 593-3200
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Oral Majority: Every Tue. 5:45 p.m., DENNY'S, Ann Arbor Rd. & I-275, Plymouth.
Saturday Sunrises: Every Sat. 8:45 a.m., "UNITY HALL", 26660 S. River, Livonia.

BIRMINGHAM, FARMINGTON, SOUTHFIELD Phone 538-4884 or 573-2523
Birmingham T-Me: 2nd & 4th Tues. 6:30 p.m., COMMUNITY HOUSE, 280 S. Bates, Birmingham.
Windbaggers: Every Thur. 6:30 p.m., SVEDEN HOUSE, 31830 Grand River, Farmington.
Federal Mogul T-Me: 2nd & 4th Thur. 12 noon, 26555 Northwestern Hwy., Southfield.
NCA Voices: Excellence: 2nd & 4th Tues., 5:00 p.m., 17330 Northland Park Ct., Southfield.
Lawrence Tech U.: Every Thur. 6:00 p.m., 21000 W. 10 Mile, #E-159, Southfield.
Northwestern: Every Mon. 6:30 p.m., FRANKLIN CLUB Apts Library, 20830 Franklin, Southfield.

REDFORD, WESTLAND, WAYNE Phone 561-8853 or 455-1635
Dearborn Dynamics: Every Tue. 6:30 p.m., RAMS HORN, Plymouth & Telegraph Rds., Redford.
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The Advocates: Every Thur. 6:00 p.m., OMEGA, 34824 Michigan Ave., Wayne.

BLOOMFIELD, ANN ARBOR Phone 363-3690 or 434-8369
Jewish Community Center: Every Tue. 7:30 p.m., 6500 W. Maple Rd., West Bloomfield.
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Dominos Farms: Every Wed. 6:00 p.m., 30 Frank Lloyd Wright Dr., Ann Arbor.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Contact
A.J. Moore ATM/422-8364, B. Boylan ATM 538-4884, D. Renaud ATM 494-2893