

COMEDIANS
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ALL NERVES

Lake Dwoskin, Bill Bushart is "all nerves" until he steps on stage and converts those jitters into energy. Bushart, in addition to playing clubs all over Michigan, teaches comedy classes at Joey's. "I can't wait to get out there," said Bushart of Farmington Hills. "I was the seventh of eight children. I got into this so someone would listen to me."

Bushart always seems just one step away from bursting into his act. He's quick to tell anyone who'll listen that as a kid Don Rickles was his hero. The nuns at Our Lady of Loretto where he went to school said not to watch the irreverent comic, as Bushart would catch Rickles whenever he could never imagining one day he'd follow in his footsteps.

As a student at University of Detroit, Bushart founded the *Redford Connection*, but soon learned running a newspaper was a tough business. After graduation, Bushart had to supplement his income by substituting teaching for Redford Union Schools. Then six years ago, a friend talked him into taking a class at Mark Ridley's.

"Doing comedy is all about building self-esteem. It's an attitude adjustment. Since I got into comedy, I don't think there's anything I can't



JIM JACQUELLO / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Jeff Dwoskin performs at Joey's Comedy Club in Livonia. He's concentrating on making his mark as a comedian.

accomplish," Bushart said. "In the classes I can't teach them to be funny, but can help them structure jokes. It's best for them to talk about what they know, read the newspaper. There's a wealth

of information to draw on.

"I accept anyone into the class. It's all positive. I never tell anyone there's no hope. It's all about having the motivation. My philosophy in comedy is there are nights you're going to bomb and if you can't fail, you're in the wrong business."

Dave Mishevitz knows first-hand how tough it is to break into comedy. For the last year, he's done commercials during the day to pay the bills so he could work on routines at the Comedy Store in Los Angeles at night. Mishevitz admits he was "never the class clown" at Detroit Catholic Central High School in Redford. It wasn't until he went to Ball State University in Indiana that he began working with an improv troupe. From there he moved to Chicago and then L.A. He was recently featured in Barry Dougherty's book *How to Do It Standing Up*, a book for fledgling comics. Every three months he returns to Michigan to work the clubs. This open mic night, he was testing new material for his headline act Wednesday through Saturday night at Joey's.

"As a comic, every night is different," Mishevitz said. "You might have a night when you don't have anything but applause and laughs and the next you bomb. It's an addiction where you have to get on stage. On the business side, it's. Am I going to get the dollar menu today, am I going to have to get a job?"

GIVING COMICS A CHANCE

Mark Ridley's watched thousands of comics

struggle to break into the business over his 24 years as owner of the Comedy Castle. He believes for many their open mic time led to successful careers. The Rochester Hills resident tells stories of Tim Allen "always being very professional, dressed in a sport coat or suit." Perfecting material at open mic nights most likely led to Allen landing the role as the bungling just of *Tool Time* on the *Home Improvement* television series.

Ridley takes pride in helping young comics and fondly recalls the airfares of Jay Leno and Jerry Seinfeld costing him more than their fees in 1989.

"It's like a diamond that starts out as a chunk of coal," Ridley said. "Some people are naturally funny, but some people don't have the ability to piece it together. In the classes, we teach them how to do that along with how to put together a good routine."

Roger Feeny's provided a venue for up-and-comers on and off for almost 19 years. Once a week as general manager of the Ann Arbor Comedy Showcase, Feeny selects comics for open mic. Weekends he features national acts.

"There has to be some sort of outlet for talent to develop, a place to refine four to five minutes of material," Feeny said. "I tell them to get stage time anywhere you can. On week-ends, I develop talent through guest sets before national acts."

Clubs no joke in the community

BY LINDA ANN CHOMY
STAFF WRITER

Comedy clubs are more than just a place to enjoy a good joke.

Most offer classes to learn the craft, even if pursuing a career as a standup comic isn't your goal. Adults and children can benefit from learning to speak in front of a crowd.

"It's a great art-form for kids," said Karen Bell-Brege, a member of Totally Unrehearsed Theatre, an improvisation troupe performing Tuesday nights at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle. The Troy High School graduate is teaching a Kids Comedy Camp for ages 9-16 Saturdays, April 19 and 26, at the Royal Oak Club.

"It teaches them to think on their feet, think quick. I've done presentations at fine art days in West Bloomfield and Lake Orion Schools, and it teaches them to follow the rules. There's lots of rules to follow in improv, believe it or not. It's all about supporting your partners and being in the moment, letting inhibitions go. Adults especially are so inhibited.

This teaches them to be themselves before they get into that box-thinking."

Creativity led Mark Ridley to open up his Comedy Castle to the community. Organizations and charities regularly use the club to hold fund-raisers.

"We've had everyone from Royal Oak Fire to Police (departments) come in and raise money by buying the room or block of tickets," said Ridley. "We book a comedian and they buy the tickets for \$3 and sell them for whatever. People are always looking for something different to raise money."

When Troy comedian Brian Kalakie lost a friend to AIDS, he decided to organize a show to benefit the AIDS Partnership Michigan Foundation at 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 9, at Mark Ridley's. For tickets, call the club (248) 542-9900 or Kalakie at (248) 420-6406.

"AIDS Partnership offers counseling to HIV-positive patients and their families as well as provides outreach for heterosexuals and gays," said Kalakie, who's been working open mic nights at Ridley's and Yuk-Yuks in Windsor the last 18

months after taking a class at Ridley's.

"I lost a friend to AIDS. It's my way of contributing to the fight against AIDS. It's not just jokes. It affects everyone who's sexually active."

COMEDY FOR A CAUSE

Bill Bushart's desire to help others led to him starting Comedy for a Cause at Joey's Comedy Club in Livonia. Dates are filling up fast. So far, Livonia Junior Athletics, Clareneville and Franklin high school wrestling teams, and Westland Police Explorers, have all raised money. For information, call Bushart at Joey's (734) 261-0555.

"We help them choose a comedian and they get to keep \$9 out of every \$12 ticket they sell," said Bushart, Joey's marketing manager and a Farmington Hills comedian. "Joey's makes money on dinner and drinks. The organization wins and we get people who've never been in the club before."





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