

# College 'joke' pays off

By Jill Hamilton  
special writer

Once people see Just Kidding Productions' "Where's My Thurnos?" tour, they're hooked. And that's good news for the 10-person comedy troupe. The bad news is that people are used to getting comedy doses in a stand-up form, not from an ensemble.

According to Jason Allington, co-producer with Rob Marx, "Any time we can get someone to come and see us, we get booked."

It's certainly true. The troupe has played in college towns throughout the country, ranging from California to Pennsylvania. They've been asked back 95 percent of the time — pretty good for a bunch of kids still in college.

Allington, a Livonia native, has a theory about it. "The comedy market is getting over-saturated," he said, "so, stand-up comedians are getting more outrageous — Andrew Dice Clay is the largest grossing comedian right now."

Allington thinks that will actually help Just Kidding, since the ensemble focuses on clever, subtle humor instead of outrageous gimmicks.

Just Kidding Productions is a

group of five actors, two actresses and two producers.

Their shows consist of several skits strung together. "Saturday Night Live"-style. The actors play characters ranging from Nosiradamus to kids in a second grade class.

IT'S EASY to forget that the sketches are written, acted and directed entirely by students. The skits are professional and hilarious at the same time.

The latest incarnation of the show consists of two hours worth of sketches and vignettes — old and new — poking fun at heavy metal music, Greek gods, the dawn of man and more.

Just Kidding Productions began in September 1988 when Jon Hein and a group of friends in the University of Michigan's Comedy Company started fantasizing about how much fun it would be if they could start their own troupe and maybe even make some money.

Somewhere along the way, the idea became serious and in February 1989, the group gave their first show at Central Michigan University.

"It's an incredible success," Allington said.

From then on they were hooked. Several members of the group inter-

rupted their college career to pursue the dream. They bought a 15-passenger van and set out to sample life on the comedy road.

Several months and 40 shows later, Just Kidding is back in Michigan for an engagement Friday, Jan. 19, at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor. At a September performance at the Power Center, the show sold out and 500 people had to be turned away. The group expects the January show to be just as successful.

THIS MIGHT be one of the last chances to see Just Kidding perform because the future of the group is uncertain. Although the group is attracting the interest of agents and has been accepted by the National Association of College Activities, the group still has to handle all their own bookings.

Since several of the members are anxious to finish their studies, the future of the group is "hanging in the balance."

Just Kidding will perform Friday, Jan. 19, at the Michigan Theatre in Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$8 (\$5 students) in advance and \$9 (\$6 students) at the door. For information, call 971-9225.



Michigan members of Just Kidding include co-producer Jason Allington of Livonia, Jon Glaser of Southfield, Sara Mathison of Battle Creek and Kristin Soddlich of Canton Township.

## 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, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

• **Bea's Comedy Kitchen**  
Skeeter Murray, Brent Cushman and Downtown Tony Brown will perform Friday-Saturday, Jan. 19-20, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. For information, call 961-2581.

• **Chaplain's East**  
John Bowman with Jeff Shaw and

Tim Pryor will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 17-20, at Chaplain's East, 34244 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 792-1902.

• **Chaplain's West**  
Damon Waynes, along with Dan Dillon and Shaun Hunter, will perform Friday-Saturday, Jan. 19-20, at Chaplain's West, 16890 Telegraph, south of Six Mile, Detroit. For information, call 533-8866.

• **Mainstreet**  
Brent Cushman will perform

Wednesday-Thursday, Jan. 17-18, and Lowell Sanders will perform Friday-Saturday, Jan. 19-20, at Mainstreet Comedy Showcase, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and 7, 9 and 11 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 956-9080.

• **Joey's Livonia**  
Tim O'Rourke will perform along with Greg Scott and Carl Anthony Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 17-20, at Joey's Comedy Club, 36071 Plymouth, east of Levan, Livonia. Show times are 9 p.m. Thursday and Fri-

day and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. For reservations, call 261-0555.

• **Joey's Allen Park**  
Bill Thomas will perform along with Steve Bills and Mario Wednesday-Saturday, Jan. 17-20, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, 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.

• **Holly Hotel**  
Norm Stulz will perform along with Roland Kimble and Keith Ruff

Thursday-Saturday, Jan. 18-20, at Holly Hotel, 110 Battle Alley, Holly. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Thursday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 834-1891.

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