

Mike Thornton puts a little magic into eating out



Magician Mike Thornton performs at Silverman's of Plymouth for customers Jim and Liz Kellner of Plymouth Township.

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Diners at Detroit-area restaurants don't generally expect to see a tableside magic show.

It's possible that they might see such a performance, however. Mike Thornton, 28, is among area magicians who perform at restaurants.

"They love it. It's different," said Thornton, a Canton resident. "It's very unique to see magic that close up."

He performs at Max and Erma's restaurants and at several Silverman's locations. Thornton, a full-time magician, begins by introducing himself and asking diners if they'd like to see a brief magic show.

"For the most part, people find it a pleasant surprise." Occasionally, diners would rather not see a performance, but that's more the exception than the rule.

"People aren't there to see magic, they're there to eat. The only appropriate times for his performances are right after the menus are taken or right after diners finish eating."

HE PERFORMS for five to seven minutes at each table "or until the food arrives. I make a quick exit as soon as the food comes. I do my disappearing act."

Thornton, who grew up in Detroit, has been performing at restaurants for about five years. He also does big shows, performing at company parties, trade shows and sales meetings. He's continued to

perform for children and adults through the years.

Thornton, a 1981 graduate of Bishop Borgess High School in Redford, has been interested in magic for a number of years. His interest began as a hobby.

"I got a magic kit for Christmas," his mother got him a magic kit when he was in second or third grade. When he was in the sixth or seventh grade, Thornton began to do shows for birthday parties and local library gatherings.

In high school, Thornton began to do paid shows. He wasn't the most serious student in school.

Through junior high and high school, I was the class clown. I worked on a lot of material that way. If it was funny, I didn't get in trouble."

AFTER GRADUATION, he studied at the Chavez School of Prestidigitation and Manual Dexterity in Colon, Mich., magic capital of the world.

"I furthered my training going there." That six-month course is designed "solely to teach you sleight of hand, misdirection and showmanship. That's where all the magicians gather."

Following graduation from that program, Thornton worked for three years at a Ferndale magic shop, the Romig Magic Co. He did magic shows during that time, honing his skills.

"Comedy's a big part of the act. I'm a magician who happens to be funny, not a comedian who happens to do magic. The No. 1 thing, I'm trying to entertain. My specialty is

performing what magicians call close-up."

He performs at some five or six restaurants per week, appearing at some 75 to 100 tables. Performing up close in restaurants isn't like doing big shows.

"You can't use all the same methods. You have to have done your homework."

"It's totally different. I find it more satisfying as far as the rapport with the audience."

THORNTON'S PERFORMANCES include things intended to appeal to kids, such as making balloon sculptures.

"It keeps them busy. Parents don't have to bring the crayons."

Things are done on a smaller scale at restaurant shows, although the effect is similar. On stage, he might cut and restore a rope, and would use dental floss for that at a restaurant performance.

"Everyone asks if I can make their bill disappear." He can't do that, but does offer to double bills.

Magician Mike Thornton will begin appearing 5-9 p.m. Sundays, starting Oct. 28, at the Max and Erma's restaurants in Birmingham, Rochester, Livonia and Farmington Hills. Other magicians also perform at the four restaurants during that time each Sunday. Thornton appears Thursday through Sunday at Silverman's restaurants in Plymouth, Ann Arbor, Taylor and Monroe, with the Plymouth performances scheduled for 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays.

COMEDY CLUBS

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

● CHAPLIN'S EAST

Rick Kers will perform with Barry Fox and Danny Grey Wednesday-Saturday, Oct. 17-20, at Chaplin's East, 3424 Groesbeck, Fraser. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 792-1902.

● CHAPLIN'S WEST

T.C. Hatter will perform with Brad Nelson and Todd Grove Tuesday-Saturday, Oct. 16-20, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph, south of Six Mile, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 533-8866.

● CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Tim Rowlands will perform with Michael Blackman Wednesday-Saturday, Oct. 17-20, at Chaplin's Plymouth, at the Radisson, 14707 Northville Road, Plymouth. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 454-4680.

● MAINSTREET

Steve & Leo will perform Friday and Saturday, Oct. 19-22, at Main Street 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.

● BEA'S COMEDY KITCHEN

Mary Welch will perform along with Mike Bonner and Downtown Tony Brown Friday-Saturday, Oct. 19-20, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541

Larned, Detroit. Show times are 9 and 11 p.m. For information, call 961-2581.

● COMEDY CASTLE

Thom Sharp will perform with Mario Sciorlino Tuesday through Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 16-20, at the Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth, Royal Oak. Show time is 7 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 542-9990.

● JOEY'S LIVONIA

Jeff Brannan will perform along with Geeky Guy Wednesday-Saturday, Oct. 17-20, at Joey's Comedy Club, Plymouth Road, between Wayne and Levan roads, Livonia. Show times are 9 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 261-0555.

● JOEY'S ALLEN PARK

Billy Garra and Kea Brown and

Lisa Golch will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Oct. 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.

● JOEY'S AT THE ROXY

Ray Talson will perform Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 18-20, at Joey's Comedy Club at the Roxy, 11175 Haggerty Road, Belleville. Show times are 9 p.m. Thursday and 8:30 and 10:45 p.m. Friday-Saturday. For information, call 659-1829.

● HOLLY HOTEL

John Bowman will perform with Perry Wright and Jill Washburn

Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 18-20, at the Holly Hotel, 110 Battle Alley, Holly. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Thursday and 8:30 (no smoking show Friday only) and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 634-1891.

● MISS KITTY'S

Carla Fillaha will perform along with Michael Angelo Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 18-20, 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.

● LOONEY BIN

Norm Stals will perform with Steve Billalitter and Tony Maslak Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 18-20, at

the Wolverine and Looney Bin Restaurant and Comedy Club, 1655 Gengary, Walled Lake. Show times are 9 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and 8 and 10:30 p.m. Saturday. Wednesday and Thursday shows are free. For more information, call 569-9374.

● 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 353-9469.

● FOX THEATRE

George Burns will perform at 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 19, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. Tickets are \$35. For information, call 872-1000.

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ENTRY FORM:

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Send completed form to: Showcase Film Quiz, The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, MI 48150. Responses of The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and Eccentric Cinemas are not eligible. Winner's choice is final at all times.

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