

Lenny Clarke makes it with his blue collar humor

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Lenny Clarke looks like a guy one would find at a Boston Bruins game, calling opposing players "chaw-da heads" with suds spilling out of his beer mug.

Except his hockey knowledge is a little suspect.

"Detroit, hey the Red Wings are a great team. Stan Mikita played for them, right?"

No, ah, Mikita played with the Blackhawks.

"Bobby Hull, he was a Red Wing, right?"

Nope, another Blackhawks.

"Well what about the guy who got caught with cocaine in his underwear? What ever happened to that sorry . . . (guy)?" said Clarke, sensing he has obviously blown his chance as a color commentator on "Hockey Night in Canada."

The Bruins are another matter, though. He knows a lot of players on the Boston hockey team. He's also a friend of Detroit Piston John Salley, who is quite the comedian himself.

If anything, though, Clarke knows working class life. He graduated summa cum laude from the School of Hard Knocks.

Clarke grew up in a family of eight. His dad worked three jobs to make ends meet.

... Clarke was employed as a janitor before his comedic career began to blossom. He also ran for mayor of Cambridge, Mass., where he worked as a custodian for the city.

SO, STARRING in a sitcom about a hard-working, blue collar dude who has an opinion on everything is natural for Clarke. "Lenny" airs on CBS.

After all, Clarke was employed as a janitor before his comedic career began to blossom. He also ran for mayor of Cambridge, Mass., where he worked as a custodian for the city.

Clarke campaigned on the promise to clean up city hall. The other guy won, but Clarke still had to clean city hall.

He also made an aborted run for Congress. Then some young turn named Joseph Kennedy decided to enter the race.

"I spent \$80 on my campaign; he spent \$2 million," said Clarke, who majored in political science at the University of Massachusetts. "I have some really nice bumper stickers,

though."

CRITICS SAY he has a nice TV show. "Lenny" originally aired 8 p.m. Wednesdays during the fall before being pulled by the network. The show returned to Saturday nights. On Wednesdays, the show was getting its clock cleaned by NBC's "Unsolved Mysteries" and ABC's "The Wonder Years."

Despite that, CBS called for three more shows to be made, showing enough faith to keep "Lenny" going.

If anything, the show depicts the last of a dying breed in this yuppie, high-tech society: Lenny Calahan, the show's character, works as a gas company construction worker and moonlights as a doorman at a Boston hotel.

With no prior acting experience, Clarke slipped right into the role with no problem.

"This TV thing is just a sidekick."

CLARKE'S FIRST love is stand-up comedy, something he has been doing for 12 years. Touchstone Television executives caught his act at the Just for Laughs comedy showcase in Montreal. They, in turn, recommended Clarke to producers for "Lenny."

Like his television character, Clarke is ripe with opinions.

On Mayor Coleman Young's "Prime Time Live" appearance: "Here you have a mayor of a big city. You have to have some decorum. He sounded more like Andrew Dice Clay."

On John Salley's comedic talents: "He's a quick learner. He could be a really good stand-up comedian. He just has to write some material. He's naturally funny. When you talk with him, he makes you laugh."

On the state's economy: "I think the federal government should develop some type of job program just so people don't have to relocate to find a better job. I mean, c'mon, did GM have to go to Tennessee to build Saturn?"

HIS STAND-UP routine runs along the same lines, turning political and other current events into laughter.

It's a fine line between political humor and political preacher.

Clarke believes his appeal lies in his sincerity, an everyday Joe just



Comedian Lenny Clarke plays it for laughs as the star of the CBS "Lenny," a sitcom about a hard-working, blue collar dude who has an opinion on everything.

trying to make a buck.

"It's true, people don't like to be reminded about what they see on the TV news. Then they look at me and

say, 'He came from nothing and made it.'"

"I'm living the American dream. It may sound corny, but it's true."

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 Scholerfer, Livonia 48150.

● CHAPLIN'S EAST

Van Gaster will appear along with Dave Klea and Karl Anthony Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 12-15, at

Chaplin'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.

● CHAPLIN'S WEST

Mark Voerman will appear along with Michael Casper and Bill Bar Tuesday-Saturday, Dec. 11-15, at Chaplin's West, 16890 Telegraph, one block south of Six Mile, Detroit.

Show times are 8 and 10:30 p.m. For information, call 533-8866.

● CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Tim Cise will appear along with Harry Telowitz Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 12-15, at Chaplin's Plymouth, 14707 Northville. Show times are 8:30 Wednesday and Thursday; 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 454-4680.

● MAINSTREET

Dennis Wolfberg will perform Friday-Saturday, Dec. 14-15, 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
Tim Lilly will perform along with Skeeter Murray and Al Langston Friday-Saturday, Dec. 14-15, at Bea's Comedy Kitchen, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. For information, call 961-2581.

● COMEDY CASTLE

Jimmy Aleck will perform Tuesday-Saturday, Dec. 11-16, 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 542-9900.

● JOEY'S LIVONIA

Tony Hayes will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 12-15, 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

Tim O'Rourke will perform

Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 12-15, 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.

● JOEY'S AT THE ROXY

Melvin George will perform Wednesday-Saturday, Dec. 12-15, at Joey's Comedy Club at the Roxy, 11175 Haggerty Road, Belleville. For information, call 699-1829.

● MISS KITTY'S

Coupla Fat Guys will perform along with Lee Ramsey Tuesday-Saturday, Dec. 12-15, at Miss Kitty's Comedy Club, Long Branch Restaurant, 595 N. Lapeer Road, Oxford. Show times are 8 and 10:30 p.m. Fri-

day and Saturday. For information, call 628-6500.

● LOONEY BIN

Tim Butterfield will perform with Steve Mitchell and John Remick Friday-Saturday, Dec. 14-15, at the Wolverine and Looney Bin Restaurant and Comedy Club, 1655 Glenary, 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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