

Comedy means serious business on Grand Strand

Tough times create desire for laughter

BY MATT MONTGOMERY FOR THE HERALD

The expanding comedy scene on the Grand Strand is no laughing matter. In fact, it's serious business.

Two of the six full-time comedy clubs in South Carolina are located in the Myrtle Beach area, and it seems the timing for the opening of one could not have been better. The owner of that club said the sour economy creates a sickness for which only laughter is the remedy.

"A lot of the full-time comedy clubs dropped to just two nights and it's obvious people really wanted more," said Jeff Martin, owner of Stand Up Carolina. "Especially times when the economy is bad, people just want to laugh."

Martin and his business partner owned Tequila Mockingbirds, a bar that featured stand up two nights per week. When the pair started selling out every comedy night, it only made sense to revamp the venue to a full-time comedy establishment.

They shut down for a complete renovation in early April and reopened as Stand Up Carolina, 3140D U.S. 17 Business in Murrells Inlet, on May 5, just in time for the summer season.

Martin said a unique aspect of his club is the design. He consulted with comedian friends about what to include and used some of his own ideas and experiences (he's also a comedian) to give the talent and audience the best show.

"It was cool to design a comedy club being a comedian," he

said. "We re-routed the air conditioning vents to fall right on stage. I asked all my comedian friends what they would do if they designed a club. I took the best ideas and went from there."

The Comedy Cabana, 9588 N. Kings Highway in Myrtle Beach, has been serving up comedy for 14 years. Considered the grandfather of comedy houses along the Strand, general manager Lindsay Murphy said the Cabana is now open seven nights per week and open in the off-season.

Moreso now than ever, I've just seen an increase in the variety of crowds.

Lindsay Murphy
General manager
Comedy Cabana |

She attributes Comedy Cabana's sustainability to its knack for grabbing up-and-coming talent before they hit the big time. Comedians like Lewis Black, Gallagher and Kevin James have all performed at the Comedy Cabana. Nowadays, it's still fair to say Myrtle Beach comedy is popular.

"Moreso now than ever, I've just seen an increase in the variety of crowds," Murphy said. "People know these comics. They know who these guys are."

Murphy said the accessibility that the common fan has to the comedians nowadays is extraordinary — sites like youtube.com, funnyordie.com and comedycentral.com have made it easy to witness acts before they happen.

As for the future of Comedy Cabana, Murphy said the man-



MATT MONTGOMERY | THE HERALD

Comedian Jamie Morgan entertains customers at the comedy club Stand-Up Carolina.

agement has no plans to go anywhere. The Cabana's open mic competition held in the fall and spring have "exploded," she said.

What about the new guy, Stand Up Carolina?

"We're definitely supportive of the other clubs because they all support the industry," she said.

Since opening in May, Martin said he's been surprised by the success at Stand Up Carolina. He's already welcomed "In Living Color" star Tommy Davidson, and sold out six straight shows. On Aug. 18, Josh Wolfe from the E! show "Chelsea Lately" will perform three shows and "Mad TV" star Aries Spears will visit Sept. 8 for a trio of shows. The big names don't stop at Stand Up Caroli-

na. Another Myrtle Beach venue will host comedic giants Jim Gaffigan and Larry The Cable Guy, who will perform at the Alabama Theatre on Nov. 21.

Unscripted

Aside from big name stand-up stars, the Grand Strand is also home to a budding improvisational troupe, Carolina Improv Company.

The company started in November 2008 and began doing comedy shows in its brand new theatre space, Uptown Myrtle Beach, one year later. Currently the improvisational company is doing five shows per week, including the audience-fueled "Whose Beach is it Anyway?" where tourist clichés are brought to life by comedy.

Classes for adults and youth are offered on various nights as well.

Lead director Gina Trimarco said since improv comedy is fairly new to Myrtle Beach, a spin-off of the popular "Whose Line is it Anyway?" was the easiest way to communicate the concept.

So is it working?

"Definitely yes," Trimarco said. "We've done very little advertising and managed to fill the seats. We spend a lot of time on marketing via social media and Internet listings. Most of our guests say that they found us by Googling 'things to do in Myrtle Beach'."

"Many come to the show often because it's never the same and it's the best deal on the beach for comedy and au-

dience interaction."

Kevin Perry first went to a "Whose Beach" performance this spring and has since returned several times and even solicited the comedy troupe for a corporate event.

"I asked [the corporate organizer], 'How much money do we have for entertainment?' After it was cleared, they were hired for our conference this year. They got by far the highest level of review at our conference," said Perry, an assistant director at Coastal Carolina University.

Perry said the fact that the show is different from the regular nightlife scene around Myrtle Beach makes it worth going to see.

He said the show's content changes each time, so guests never know what to expect.

"They do a really good job of doing things different every time," he said. "It doesn't get old. Each time you go, it's a different show."

The show has also led Perry to pursue an adult improv class at Uptown. He plans to do that in the fall.

Trimarco echoed Martin's contention that the tanking economy lends to comedy attraction.

She said since people want to laugh and not spend a lot of money, Carolina Improv Company is a great choice.

Perry said he tells people the best parts about "Whose Beach is it Anyway?" are the affordability, time (starts at 7:30 p.m.) and the show's change of pace.

When Trimarco relocated to Myrtle Beach, the first thing she noticed was the absence of comedy. Now, she said, the future looks bright.

"When I moved here, I thought to myself, 'This town has no idea what they're missing. I think I'll build it and watch them come.'"

Matt Montgomery • 488-7261

the
Scott Richards Show
Weekdays 2pm-6pm

Easy
105.9 100.7
WEZV-FM WGTN-FM

BEECHWOOD HOTEL
FOUR CROWN HOTEL AS RATED BY NORTHSTAR TRAVEL MEDIA

COME SEE THE BEST CENTRAL MASS HAS TO OFFER

LOCATED LESS THAN AN HOUR FROM BOSTON, PROVIDENCE AND THE BERKSHIRES, THE BEECHWOOD IS THE ONLY BOUTIQUE HOTEL IN CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS. PERFECT FOR A CASUAL NIGHT OUT, FAMILY VACATION, OR ROMANTIC GETAWAY, THE HOTEL OFFERS LUXURIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS AND AMENITIES, STATE-OF-THE-ART BUSINESS SERVICES, AND A PRISTINE GRAND BALLROOM FOR FUNCTIONS AND MEETINGS.

BEECHWOOD HOTEL
FOUR CROWN HOTEL AS RATED BY NORTHSTAR TRAVEL MEDIA

363 PLANTATION STREET, WORCESTER, MA
508.754.5789 | BEECHWOODHOTEL.COM

NOW INTRODUCING

CERES
BISTRO