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## "Yes, and..." in the moment with gina trimarco

By Roger Yale - For Weekly Surge



Gina Trimarco on stage at Theatre of the Republic in Conway.

*Photo by Scott Smallin, Weekly Surge staff.*

"I have to be comfortable even if I am uncomfortable," says Gina Trimarco, founder of the Carolina Improv Company in Myrtle Beach. A Myrtle Beach resident for a little more than two years, Trimarco has embraced the Grand Strand and all it has to offer, making connections at every juncture.

Born and raised in Chicago, Trimarco graduated from DePaul University with a degree in communications. She also trained at the fabled Second City, an improvisational and sketch comedy enterprise that nurtured the talents of Bill Murray, Gilda Radner, John Belushi and Mike Myers. "I started out as an accounting major at DePaul," she says. "While studying improv at Second City, I found my passion for creativity and writing, producing and directing - and ultimately changed my major to journalism. Then I went the track of radio, television and film."

This track led to work as a producer, production coordinator and script supervisor in various combinations. Her first official job in college was what she calls "being the grunt" on the Jenny Jones Show pilot. "That was a hoot," she says. "I interned all over creation and produced a top radio show in Chicago, but when I graduated from DePaul, it was during the recession of 1990 - and I couldn't find a job to save my life."

But Trimarco thinks on her feet, a skill she attributes to her improv training. "I ended up going into television and film on a freelance basis, and it worked out well because I had already made a lot of contacts." She found herself on a path that involved marketing for the entertainment sector - working for the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, Butterfield's Auctioneers, Spirit Cruises and Chicago Center for the Performing Arts. She ultimately became general manager at the IMAX Theatre at Navy Pier, a major tourist destination in Chicago.

Then the Grand Strand came into play. "I was recruited by a company that took over the IMAX in Myrtle Beach," she says. I was running one of the top IMAX theaters in the country, if not the world, and I turned that business around. I

got a reputation in the industry." She became general manager/theatre director in May 2007. After 18 months, Trimarco and IMAX parted ways. "We saw things differently about how to run an IMAX Theatre in a tourist destination."

"I credit improv for everything in my career life," says Trimarco. "Improv got me started down a creative path, and the whole concept of improv is something called 'yes, and.' It's about saying yes and building something onto an idea. So when people offer you ideas or suggestions or possibilities, you don't say, 'oh, that will never work.' You're like, 'OK, yeah - you want to start a business - and I think you will. It's a really cool way to live your life, and the more you live that way, you won't say no to anything. All you can do is try, and there's no such thing as failure."

Trimarco found herself in need of an improv fix. "It's kind of like therapy to take an improv class because it really readjusts you," she says. To her chagrin, there were no such classes to be found on the Grand Strand." I hooked up with a company called Dirty South Improv near Chapel Hill [N.C.] and got my fix."

Someone suggested that Trimarco should start teaching improv here. "That really wasn't my intention, but 'yes, and,'" she laughs.

An encounter with Diane DeVaughn Stokes brought her closer to her mark. Stokes, then host of the long-running television show, Southern Style, invited Trimarco to talk about improv on the show. "I had to create a class, and I called the guy at Dirty South and asked for help."

"Out of nowhere, everything snowballed. I created a Web identity, created the brand and logo, got a new phone number - literally threw it all together just so I could go on Diane's show."

Flash forward: Carolina Improv Company ([www.carolinaimprov.com](http://www.carolinaimprov.com)) now boasts full classes, performs weekly shows at Docksider's Grille at Barefoot Resort, and does teambuilding for companies. "The reception has been far greater than I ever thought it would be."

We asked if Trimarco has seen people go from shrinking violet to improv master. "Oh yeah - and that's the high I never expected to get. It might be a tiny change or a huge change, but everybody changes. Students come to me and say 'thank you for what you do.' This has really affected me. That was my 'aha!' moment - to watch people go from totally no confidence to superstar."

Trimarco says she is looking for a permanent performance location. "There is a great market here for affordable entertainment, and improv is so much fun because it's interactive, like 'Who's Line Is It Anyway?' It's a great entertainment option for tourists and nobody else does it here," she says.

"Improv your life and you will laugh a little more," she says. "Take an improv class."