

Life and Art

ENTERTAINMENT • LIFESTYLES • TRENDS

Bustin' a gut

When college comedians test their trade, comedy is serious business

By ANGELA HORNSBY
The Red & Black, U. of Georgia

It's Thursday night in Athens. While some students cram for tests or catch up on reading assignments, others are learning a different lesson.

Dressed in a loose dress shirt and slacks, Willie Lowe and the other members of the Georgia Amateur Comedians' Club are giving U. of Georgia students something to laugh about.

Mark Gould, president of the club, said the shows, which take place in the cozy basement of a bar called Club Fred, regularly spotlight about 14 amateur stand-up comics. The acts, ranging from ventriloquism to juggling, take the stage every two weeks with routines lasting about 10 minutes each.

Gould, a UGA senior, said the group fills a void in the comedy clubless, yet progressive town of Athens. "The closest comedy club is the Punchline in Atlanta, almost an hour and a half away."

Matthew Robinson, a comic and UGA senior, said the club expands Athens nightlife. "Everyone can go see a band, but we provide alternative entertainment," he said. "And since we're it, we're pretty popular."

The Amateur Comedians' Club formed in March 1990 when Gould recruited participants in Certs' Annual Comedy Competition, sponsored by UGA's University Union. He then petitioned the owner of Club Fred to host the show and pay for advertisement costs. After the first show, the group had made enough money to advertise its own shows.

Gould said the comedians' topics range from school to sex.

Robinson said his humor tends to be drier than most, and the humor always stops just short of the classroom.

"Professors don't care for it," Robinson said. "When you're talking about phosphenylation, that's not the time to be spewing off jokes about McDonald's."

Lowe, a regular at Fred's, said success as a stand-up is part courage, part tragedy and "a whole lot of deodorant."

Presently working on a master's degree in economics, he said he'd like to give a comedy career a shot. After a year and a half of performing, Lowe said he's received mixed reactions from his parents about his comic aspirations.

"My mom said 'uh-oh.' The first thing my father said was 'I want to



PARKER SMITH, THE RED & BLACK, U. OF GEORGIA

David Kleeber, comedy club member and amateur ham.

be your manager," he said. "For some reason, he seems to think if I make money, he's going to get some of it."

Gould said audience interaction has been good during the shows. ("Club Fred is easy," he said.) A benefit performance last spring for the homeless attracted 300 people, not a bad number considering Athens was under a tornado watch.

There are exceptions, however. Though none of the comics admitted to bombing on stage, all agreed it's not a good feeling. "If you're not doing good, you will get dead silence," Gould said. "It's worse than being heckled."

But the chance to make people laugh sustains them during these off nights. And they are laughing.

Dara Williamson, a senior English major, said she's missed only one show since the club began. "I got addicted," she said, adding the comedy club is catching on off-campus.

"I drive people here all the time," Williamson said. "Once people come here, they become used to it."

HIP HANGOUTS

Tommy burgers: Things that make you go 'mmmmm'

By KELLY TATE
The Graphic, Pepperdine U.

People come from miles away to savor the taste of a chili-topped burger that has acquired an almost cult-like following. Its home cannot exactly be called a restaurant. In fact, it's nothing more than a 4-by-4 hut. But most agree that Tommy's makes burgers the way they should be made—messy.

Among the few menu items at Tommy's of Westwood, located near U. of California, Los Angeles, the Tommy burger is the most infamous. Served with chili, onions, pickles, tomatoes and mustard, it's an acquired vice.

"A Tommy burger is so good it is just too hard to describe," said Fred Ammann, a 1990 graduate of the U. of California, Santa Barbara. Ammann spent many nights making the four-hour commute to and from Tommy's.

The food is always offered "for here or to go," but there is no "here" because there are no seats. Tommy's regulars don't seem to mind.



JOHN CHUNG, THE DAILY BRUIN, UCLA

Real-life Indiana Jones digs college retirement



PHOTO COURTESY OF DON MITCHELL

He may look tame, but Don Mitchell has tussled with the Syrian law, uncovered brothels and unearthed this 3,000-year-old statue.

By MICHAEL NELSON
The Shorthorn, U. of Texas, Arlington

He sifts through desert sands in search of relics of ancient civilizations. He's unearthed artifacts ranging from statues of pharaohs to a B.C. bordello. He's even been locked in a Syrian prison.

No, he's not Indiana Jones. He's Don Mitchell, a 60-year-old graduate student at the U. of Texas, Arlington, and a globe-trotting retiree who redefines the boundaries of the non-traditional student.

Mitchell, who graduated from UTA in 1952 with degrees in business and economics, spent 34 years as a management consultant until retiring five years ago. But within a few weeks, he realized a traditional retirement was not for him, so he traded his remote control for a pick and shovel.

"The ancient history of the Middle East had always

fascinated me; but when I went to college, the practical side won out," Mitchell said. "I've always enjoyed education and learning, so instead of sitting around, I went back to college."

But for Mitchell, college wasn't just texts and desks. The Ph.D. candidate in humanities has spent the past five summers on dig sites in Israel, Jordan, Syria and Egypt, digging up history and trouble.

In 1987, he joined a Harvard U. expedition that spent the summer uncovering one of the largest excavation sites in the world, a 2,500-year-old bordello in Ashkelon, Israel. "It was a Persian-style bordello, decorated with pornographic lamps and pottery," he said.

Mitchell said the artifacts depicted scenes that would still be considered obscene today. "They were quite unique and left nothing to the imagination," he said.

A harrowing experience for Mitchell occurred in 1988.

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