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## Laugh a Lot

*Comedy Showcase brings laughs to Main Street*

by *Dolores Fox Ciardelli*

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John DeKoven, dark-haired and portly, slowly climbed onstage at the Main Street Brewery. In a monotonous tone he welcomed the crowd to comedy night and told them about the lineup for the evening. He also mentioned his own delivery.

"I have slow-speed-itis," he told them in a deadpan tone. The crowd laughed.

DeKoven, 39, proceeded to talk about being single in Pleasanton, being Jewish, Internet dating, and his love of golf.

He joked about his brief marriage and a divorce procedure that lasted longer than the marriage. He noted that you can track a relationship by how you meet your honey at the airport, from the first stage when you meet her at the gate with flowers through to the fifth and final stage when you drive around and around until she appears in front with her luggage.

He also poked fun at his girth.

"I'm bulimic," he said, which resulted in some guffaws. "But I only throw up the healthy stuff."

It was the opening in November of John DeKoven's Comedy Showcase, which has been playing on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month ever since.

He began the venture in November, urged on by Frances Hewitt, office manager for the Pleasanton Downtown Association.

"It's great for the community," said Hewitt. "I love comedy and John cracks me up - his voice, his mannerisms."

She suggested holding the shows at the Main Street Brewery, which is adjacent to the PDA offices, and they decided on Wednesday night so it would not conflict with other downtown Thursday activities.

Hewitt gave the first show a boost by contacting the 42 Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors, a group she heads up, plus 30 other people she knows. Now she attends every show with a group of friends who e-mail her their reservations so she can save them seats at the bar.



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DeKoven is a funny guy but he's just the warm-up to the other warm-ups as he welcomes four or five comedians at each of the shows. The setup is perfect at the Brewery, he noted, with the stage across the room from the bar so its noise doesn't distract the audience.

He said he has the perfect person monitoring the door and collecting the \$5 admission - his mom, Isabelle.

"Nobody gets past her," he said, adding that although his dad was a great guy, he inherited his comedic powers from Isabelle.

For the patrons already in the Brewery for dinner or drinks, DeKoven approaches them individually and invites them to stay for the show.

"I ask them, if they enjoy it to pay the \$5," he said. Last week a man said he couldn't stay that late on a weeknight so DeKoven pointed out the show would be over by 9:30 p.m. He ended up staying - and paying.

DeKoven said that his whole life he has been compared to comedian Ben Stein, and in fact several years ago had a show on a Santa Cruz radio station called "Win John DeKoven's Money."

Even without training, DeKoven made people laugh.

"Ten years ago at my best friend's wedding, there was an emcee who wanted me to go on the road with him," recalled DeKoven. So four years ago when he saw an advertisement for a Stand-Up Comedy School in San Jose, he signed up.

"It was six classes. When we graduated we did a performance in a bar," he said.

Through the class and attending comedy clubs in the Bay Area he has built up a list of contacts. He said finding performers for the Main Street Brewery is not a problem, comedians love to perform and are hungry for venues. He picks them with care, letting the edgier ones stay in San Francisco.

"They love coming here," he said, noting that getting paid is a plus since most perform for the love of it. He said the word has spread through the comedian chat rooms on the Internet.

"There are certain types the Pleasanton crowd can relate to," he said.

"They've got to be able to be clean - but not squeaky clean. They can talk about adult subjects but not use the words."

He also noted that his Comedy Showcase is often a warm-up for comedians visiting the Bay Area for weekend gigs. It is drawing more and more patrons and often it's standing room only in the 105-seat restaurant.

"It's evolving," said Matt Billings, owner of the Main Street Brewery. He said that before the Comedy Showcase, the midweek draw was about 30 customers. "I'm happy with the results," he said.

"Where else can they go for entertainment on a Wednesday night?" DeKoven asked. "For a week night this is the best entertainment in the Bay Area." He's been asked to have the show on weekends but the Main Street Brewery has live music on those nights.

Spirit Walker, an Indian comedian, has performed at the Comedy Showcase several times. On opening night, he noted that he was going to be at the Reno Hilton that weekend.

"I wanted a comparable place to work out my material," he told the Pleasanton crowd. After a pregnant pause he added, "I'm going to fire my agent." The humor often pokes fun at Pleasanton - its small-town character and its whiteness.

He went on to tell about encounters with folks who had never talked to an Indian before and how he turns the tables, asking them questions like: "Do you mind if we move your ancestors' graves? We want to build a development."

He also did an exacting imitation of Jeff Foxworthy, playing off his "redneck" humor by saying, "You know you're a red man when ... you have more than one acorn recipe ... every time you go to a dance club, it rains."

DeKoven is not about to quit his day job - he's a Realtor and owner of Help-U-Sell Tri-Valley. He is starting to book Comedy Showcase venues in San Ramon, San Jose and Antioch and books comedians for private functions. DeKoven is also performing tomorrow night in San Francisco; for details, visit [www.laughalotproductions.com](http://www.laughalotproductions.com).

But he moves slowly, he admitted, and even after Frances Hewitt first mentioned doing comedy at the Main Street Brewery it took him seven months to begin. Blame it on his "slow-speed-itis."

### *Laughter on Main Street*

What: John DeKoven's Comedy Showcase Who: Comedians from the Bay Area and beyond When: 8-9:30 p.m., second and fourth Wednesdays of the month; next show is April 13 Where: Main Street Brewery, 830 Main St. Cost: \$5

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