

PROFILE



JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/STAFF

Bunjo's Comedy Club founder John Dekoven, of Dublin, says his club is the place to go for local talent. Bunjo's hosts open-mic nights on Fridays for amateurs and professionals.

Comedy promoter chuckles at life

■ Founder of Bunjo's in Dublin turned to stage during divorce

By David Morrill

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DUBLIN — He went through a terrible divorce. He doesn't make a lot of money. And one of his friends describes him as a "big guy with a Ben Stein monotone."

For John Dekoven, life couldn't be better.

The owner of Bunjo's Comedy Club in Dublin, Dekoven found his way onto the stage as a way to make fun of the otherwise not-so-hilarious aspects of life.

"I was going through a terrible divorce that would probably have sent me to a shrink," Dekoven said. "Instead, I went onstage and found ways to laugh about a relationship where the divorce took a year longer than the marriage lasted."

Currently, Dekoven is engaged to a woman whom he met in a most unusual way.

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"In person," he quips.

He knows he carries a few more pounds than he would like.

"I'm a 250-pound bulimic. I just throw up the healthy stuff," he jokes again.

The shows are every Friday and Saturday at the Willow Tree Restaurant in Dublin. On Fridays, it's an open mic for professionals and amateurs. On Saturdays, it's all professionals. One Sunday a month he has a show that is family-friendly.

Dekoven decides on the lineups. It's this ability to match the right comedians with the right crowd that Dekoven says is one of his big gifts.

Aside from the shows he runs in Dublin, he can quickly tap into the nearly 100 comedians he knows and come up with a perfect combination.

For example, if you have a show for a company party, Dekoven makes sure that he doesn't have a comedian that swears every other sentence because you never know who is in the crowd.

"Right now, I'm putting together a show for a company's IT department," he said, "so I'm going to find a comedian or two that has humor about computers and technology."

At a recent open-mic show in Dublin, one comedian made a quip about Carrie Prejean. A single person clapped, while others seemed not to realize she was a former Miss California and had an awkward moment on Larry King Live.

When then-Vice President Dick Cheney shot his friend in the face with a shotgun, Dekoven jumped on the opportunity.

"Thank goodness he didn't shoot himself," he said. "If he did, then Bush would have become president."

Although he loves political humor, or "smart comedy," that's about as deep as he can go with politics or current events in the suburbs, he said.

"Unless people follow the news closely and know what happened yesterday, most of the crowd won't even know what you're talking about," he said.

Children, marriage, and self-faults are usually a better way to go, Dekoven believes.

JOHN DEKOVEN

■ **JOB:** Owner of Bunjo's Comedy Club

■ **AGE:** 44

■ **RESIDENCE:** Dublin

■ **EDUCATION:** Pepperdine University, bachelor's degree in business management

■ **WEB SITE:** www.bunjoscmedyclub.com

■ **DETAILS:** Shows are held Fridays and Saturdays at the Willow Tree Restaurant, 6513 Regional St., Dublin

Even though not every comedian on amateur night will bring a laugh, Dekoven has faith in the talent.

"Even those that bomb really are not that bad, are they?" he said.

Before his stint in comedy, Dekoven owned a real estate company. He would book comedy acts on the side with Bay Area comics for restaurants and clubs such as Tommy T's.

Eventually his income was enough that he could sell his real estate business. A huge break, because a year later the market crashed.

"I was very lucky there," he said.

Last May, Dekoven started Bunjo's. He realizes that some might see it as direct competition with Tommy T's in Pleasanton.

He doesn't see it that way because his emphasis is much more local.

"If there's a certain comedian you have to see, then Tommy T's might be the place to go," he said. "But if you are looking for good laughs at a reasonable price, then we can offer that."

Shows are \$5 on Fridays and \$10 on Saturdays.

Any local comedian can sign up at www.bunjoscmedyclub.com and perform a five-minute set on a Friday. Some are regulars trying out new jokes. Others are trying to get their names out there.

"John has been a savior for comedians in the East Bay and really put the area on the map," comedian Carrie Gilbert said. "As a suburban mom, there's no way I'd be performing without John because I wouldn't be able to travel to San Francisco all the time."