

November 3, 2006

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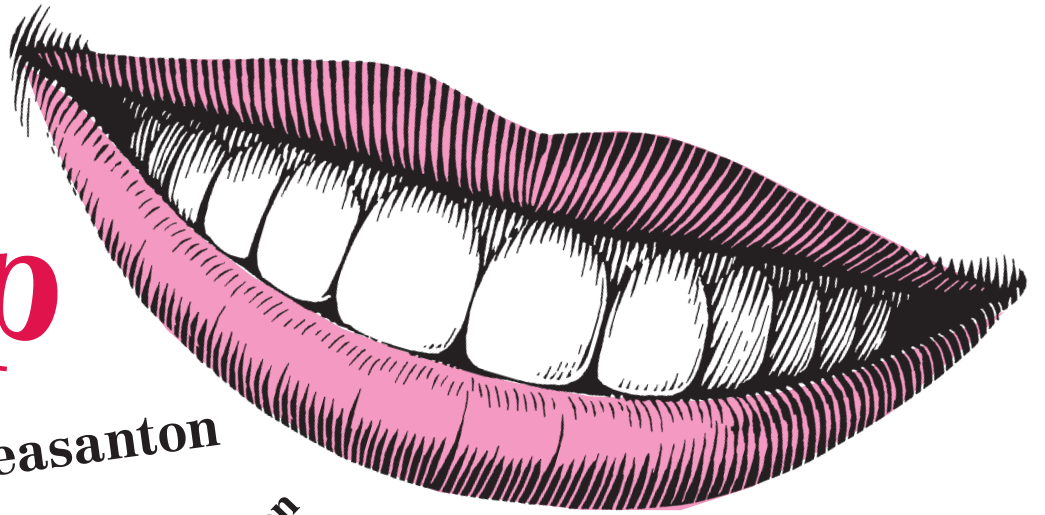
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Laugh it up

Tommy T's brings comedy to Pleasanton

by Rebecca Guyon



What's the deal with comedy in Pleasanton? Stop in at Tommy T's Comedy and Steak House and you'll find out. The comedy club opened this past August and is already drawing national comedic acts, such as comedy troupe 3 Blonde Moms, stand-up comedian Ralphie May (best known for his appearance on the reality TV show "Last Comic Standing") and comedy club veteran Bobby Slaten.

"As of right now, Ralphie May was a great show," said Tommy T's manager Mike Guida. "Of the seven shows, five were sellouts and the others were crowded—we got a really good response. He's popular and funny."

And the comics keep coming. In November, actor and comedian Eddie Griffin, who starred in the movie "Undercover Brother" and has many supporting screen credits to his name, is scheduled for two shows. Shortly thereafter, Tommy Davidson, most recognizable from the '90s hit TV show "In Living Color," will play four nights at the club.

Attracting such big name acts is no small feat in the Bay Area where a club like Tommy T's, tucked away in the suburban outskirts, must compete with more established clubs in San Francisco. Guida said part of this success so far can be attributed to the club's comfortable, yet professional, atmosphere.

"We want the comics who want to come here, and the comics who come here love our club, love our stage, love our balcony," he said. "It's conducive to watching comedy, and that's what a comic wants."

Bringing in a variety of acts also helps to attract a wide audience from around Pleasanton and beyond.

"We try to mix up it and hit as many demographics as we can," Guida said. "Bobby Slaten is a 'rated R' comic who's very funny ... then we'll have a guy like Brian Kellen who is more of a physical comic. He talks more about childhood and is more of a clean comic. We try to mix it up."

While Tommy T's has only been open for a few months in Pleasanton, owner Tommy Thomas has a long history in comedy. Thomas first got into the comedy business 30 years ago, opening a club in San Leandro. In 1986, during the height of stand-up's popularity, he opened another club in Concord, which he ran on and off for 18 years. After getting out of the business the past couple years, Thomas decided to get back in the game and opened the new Pleasanton club. Given Pleasanton's central location on the I-580/680 corridor, it seemed like a natural fit for the club, which was hoping to draw people from many nearby cities.

In addition to bringing in headliners, the club is also giving local comics a chance to perform. Local comedian John DeKoven, who runs Laugh-A-Lot Productions, hooked up with Tommy T's when it first opened and brings the Laugh-A-Lot Comedy Showcase every Tuesday night. DeKoven previously held comedy nights at Main Street Brewery, but saw the opening of Tommy T's as a new opportunity to bring his act and other comics to a different audience.

"One advantage—since it's a comedy club—it's set up for comedy," DeKoven said. "Obviously, it's a more professional atmosphere for a comedian."

The comics in the showcase are all working comics who haven't hit it big yet. Usually, several comics will perform and following the show there is an open mic for amateurs to take to the stage.

While the audiences have been good over the months he's performed at the club, DeKoven said he has found certain

topics are best to avoid in the showcase.

"They don't seem to like political humor," he said. "Usually in the showcase, it doesn't seem to go so well because people don't follow politics enough to understand it."

Still, the club's homey atmosphere has made it a comfortable place to play, and really sets it apart from the more "corporate" clubs in San Francisco or San Jose, DeKoven added.

Whether it is local comics or national acts, at the end of the day, what really matters is that everyone is laughing.

"It is fun watching crowds react," Guida said. "A good show is a good feeling—for two hours people are having a lot of fun." ■

Going to a show

Tommy T's is located at 5104 Hopyard Rd. Visit www.tommyts.com for a complete schedule or performances.



Lani Allen

Comedic troupe the 3 Blonde Moms elicit laughs from the crowd at Tommy T's. The comedy club will feature big-name comedians Eddie Griffin and Tommy Davidson this month.



Lani Allen

A large crowd takes in a comedic performance on a recent night at new Pleasanton comedy club Tommy T's on Hopyard Road.