

Arts & Entertainment



David Creamer/Daily Nebraskan

Rollin' Ray tries to coax a member of the audience to assist him in his act at Bad Comedy night.

Comics strut their stuff at Patoots

By Chris Burbach
Daily Nebraskan Staff Editor

Didja hear the one about the guy who . . . ? If you haven't, you might at the Bad Comedy Show at Patoot's Saloon, 808 P St.

Every Thursday night, comics convene at Patoots to ply their trade. In the past, they worked for laughs and little more. Now, many joke for money as well as guffaws.

The show started last March when two Patoot's employees suggested an amateur comedy night, said the show's master of ceremonies, Mark Patton. Local comics like Craig Anton and Paul Heydt kept Bad Comedy going when the times were lean. Now, the show is snowballing.

"We've got 15 to 20 acts in rotation. No act can go up two weeks in a row. We've got all kinds of different material — some guys who play characters, seven magicians, two jugglers, an improv group and some straight stand-ups," said Jeff Weak, the man who books acts for the show and performs as Rollin' Ray Dietzel.

"It started out with people just getting up and telling jokes," Weak said. "Now they work on their stuff."

Most of the comedians who perform at Bad Comedy are from Omaha, Patton said. Many work a circuit that includes Sioux City, Ia, Omaha and Kansas City, Mo. The comics use Lincoln as a testing ground.

"Comedians come here and try out material," Patton said. "They can experiment here, and they say this is a great place to work. The crowds are just incredible here, and they have been since I've

been here."

Incredible, and large. Owner Mike Swanson said he has to turn people away on Bad Comedy nights.

"I'm not surprised," Swanson said. "I was in a little tourist town in Canada and I went to see a well-known band, and there was nobody there — they were all at a comedy show."

Swanson and Patton said they thought Lincoln had potential as a comedy market, and they think their show will meet that potential. But they're not forgetting the roots of Bad Comedy.

"We're always interested in seeing new people get up and try comedy," Swanson said. "We encourage people to give it a try."

Patton said people call him at home or talk to him after the show about performing at Bad Comedy. He said he's enthusiastic about newcomers, but there is a stipulation — would-be comedians must be prepared.

"We can tell after the first show whether they've prepared or not — if they aren't, we won't ask them back," Patton said.

Some comedians who always get asked back are Bud Anderson, T. Marni Vos and Pat Hazel, who are professional comics, Patton said. Bad Comedy's paid comedians split the show's door receipts.

Weak said most comedians are "level headed — career first, comedy second," but he said that many also think about mixing the two.

"You almost have to have that in your mind," Weak said. He is preparing video tapes to send to Johnny Carson and David Letterman in hopes of performing

on the tube.

A comedian's life isn't all laughs, Weak said. Clowns aren't the only performers who hide tears behind their masks.

"Comedians aren't schizo and always out of control," Weak said. "They're more serious than anything. People say comedians are the most serious people in the world. Maybe it's because they're always looking at things, and not finding very many funny things."

Kellie Beil, a UNL student, and Debbie Stehlik of Lincoln, went to Patoots last Thursday to hear some funny things.

"We heard it was comedy night," Beil said. "We've been here before, but not for comedy night."

"It was alright. I'll be back," Stehlik said. Beil said she also enjoyed the show. "It was funny — rollin', rollin' rollin'," Beil said.

BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed

