

COMEDY 101

Iowa native returns home to teach humor skills

By **STACI SCHMIT**
Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO

Even you — the person who takes up to 10 minutes to “get” a joke — can be the resident Jerry Seinfeld of your workplace.

And not only will you bring on the laughs, says stand-up comedian Gavin Jerome, you might boost your career.

Anyone can learn to be funny, says Jerome, who runs a “comedy college” on the road, now on its way to Waterloo.

“You have to look at your sense of humor as a muscle — the more you work it, the stronger you will become,” he says, maintaining comedy is a skill. “Very few people wake up one morning and are hysterically funny — they have to work at it.”

Jerome got his stand-up start in 1987 at Boomer’s, a former downtown Waterloo restaurant and comedy club.

Since then, he’s been spreading good cheer in clubs throughout the country, but his primary focus the past few years has been teaching the trade.

Next week Jerome is returning to Waterloo to conduct a one-day seminar aimed at professionals.

He uses hands-on exercises to teach people how to use humor effectively in the workplace, and at the end of the day, gives participants a chance to strut their stuff on stage.

“You wouldn’t believe how good these people get — even in one day,” says Jerome.



Gavin Jerome
Teaches comedy

He’s learned from the best, watching well-known comedians like Dennis Miller, Dana Carvey, Bobcat Goldthwait, Elaine Bosler and Seinfeld develop routines — before they were superstars — at a Los Angeles comedy club, where he worked a stint as a cashier and door-man.

The Dubuque native moved to Los Angeles after graduating from the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls.

“I thought I was going to get discovered the minute I got off the plane,” says Jerome, now 31, who soon took the notebook of jokes he kept and threw it in the trash. “I realized I had absolutely no clue what I was doing.”

By watching the young comedians during “celebrity workout nights” at Igby’s Comedy Cabaret, Jerome learned to craft jokes, picked up some stage time and improved his act. But because of stiff Hollywood competition, he decided to bring it back home to the Midwest.

Jerome says people who don’t consider themselves funny are often frightened of humor, which he dissects to give them a better understanding of “why we laugh.”

In the workplace, Jerome says humor can lower stress, increase productivity, promote team building, improve communication and public speaking, enhance creativity, boost employee morale, build self-esteem, elevate listening skills — even increase a person’s income.

“The focus of my comedy college is finding middle-of-the-road humor — appropriate humor that doesn’t insult or offend,” in the age of being politically correct, he explains.

He offers a tip: “You will not find a successful and talented comedian who is not well-read. You must look at everything in your world — read newspapers, watch television — every sensory thing you can think of (from which) to draw comedy. ... Truth is funnier than fiction.”

Jerome also offers a four- to six-week college in Des Moines for blooming stand-up comedians, and says he will bring it to Waterloo, as well, if there is sufficient interest.

Past comedy college graduates include companies, such as the Principal Financial Group, Anheuser-Busch, Hy-Vee Food Stores, United Auto Workers, Iowa State Education Association, and individuals — doctors, teachers and media personalities, Jerome says.

“I’ve launched several comedy careers,” he adds. “People who were once pizza delivery guys!”

Gavin Jerome's Comedy College

- Jan. 10, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Holiday Inn Convention Center, downtown Waterloo
- Cost is \$99 per person; register three and the fourth person is free. For more information, or to register, call 1-800-96GAVIN