

# Comedy showcase at The Alley gains bigger audience

DANIELLE GENSBURG, Staff Writer

Throughout his life, Larry Bloom had been told that he should be a stand-up comedian.

He was known for writing good jokes, and as vice president for the Highland Park Chamber of Commerce, group leader of the Chicago-based business networking group "Breakfast of Champions," and president of ATI Graphics Inc., a company based in downtown Highland Park that provides branding, graphic design, web development and consulting services, Bloom was comfortable facilitating, mediating and speaking at various events and in front of large crowds, where he often used borderline appropriate and inappropriate jokes in his speeches that had an element of stand-up to them.

But after his father died suddenly in 2013, Bloom jumped at the opportunity to perform stand-up of his own for the very first time when he was invited by Steven Goldstein, owner of The Alley in Highwood, an entertainment venue that has been a staple on the North Shore since 1949 and offers bowling, bar and dining options, and a variety of networking, corporate and private events. The Alley was hosting a comedy night for the Small Business Advocacy Council, a group that represents and supports 900 businesses in Chicago, and Bloom, along with two other professional comedians, performed his first ever 16-minute stand-up comedy routine, the longest one he would ever have to date.

Today, Bloom hosts "The Alley's Stand-up and Comedy Sketch Night," a monthly comedy and open mic showcase that he started last April where he invites a number of talented, local comedians to perform stand-up routines at The Alley Highwood. The goal of the growing showcase and open mic event, which is free and meets on the third Thursday of every month starting at 8:30 p.m., is to bring comedy to the North Shore.

"If you go into the city, some of these comedians run from one open mic to the next, not to mention there are stand-up shows every day, all

week. There's not much in the suburbs. Not even really in Evanston, so there's really nothing on the North Shore," Bloom said. "This comedy night just seemed like a good fit, and I could actually manage and promote it because that's what I do for a lot of other things, for the Highland Park Chamber of Commerce, for my business, and for my networking group."

In an effort to bring "the funny" to the North Shore, Bloom began running the monthly comedy series, which included coordinating, emceeing each event and occasionally performing himself. He started reaching out and networking with local comedians in Chicago by attending stand-up shows and performing his own routines at Abbey Pub, a music and comedy venue in the city, where he currently performs.

"I'm doing more in the city. I'm meeting more of these comics and making connections," he said. "You start seeing some familiar faces and your name starts getting around. It's a very interesting community. They all just want a stage, and they all want people to have a good show. They want to work out their stuff. They're all very young and hungry, and our comedy night has just gotten some good traction with comics from the city."

Bloom said that at the last comedy night in February, eleven comedians performed, which was the largest to date and that the series has really grown and gained traction over the last few months.

Some of the local amateur and professional comedians who have attended The Alley's monthly comedy night in the past include Ricky March, Matt Drufer, Vickie Eisenstein, Mike Stricker, Jhovany Diaz, Miles Hendrix, David Gavri and Peter Lipsey.

"I tell these comedians I do this monthly comedy thing, and they're really interested because it's a new room, it's not the same series of showcases that they're doing all the time. It gets them in front of a different audience. I always promote it by saying 'Come up to the North Shore and make affluent people laugh. We need laughs. Be-



Larry Bloom performs at a stand-up comedy event at The Alley in Highwood. PHOTO SUBMITTED

ing rich isn't all fun and games," Bloom said, jokingly.

Bloom added that hosting the monthly comedy night is also a good way to get local organizations, businesses or charities to come out and pair comedy with their events.

The comedians perform their seven-minute sets for free, but Bloom said they are taken care of and given food and drinks throughout the night. He also said he often audio and video records the performances, in case any of the comedians want to use their clips to promote themselves, whether it be submitting them to comedy festivals or putting them up on their own YouTube channels.

As far as who has influenced him the most, Bloom said he loves comics like Louis CK, Patton Oswalt, Andy Kindler and Marc Maron.

"Those are all guys who first of

all are my contemporaries, they're old farts like me, but their sense of humor and their type of comedy is not shticky, it's somewhat cerebral, but it's also very blue. It's off-color. They're very funny and it's smart comedy," Bloom said.

Bloom has his own YouTube channel for his stand-up routines and said that his own ideas for jokes come from his daily life and experiences.

"Most of what I talk about is just from my life really," he said. "I think if you spend time watching the guys who do the open mics and showcases, the really good ones, it's coming right from their life. It's not about offending people to offend but you say things that you know people are going to laugh at."

Bloom also said that he believes there are no boundaries to good comedy and that true comedians have a drive to make people laugh

and feel good.

"I don't want to say I'm doing this as a hobby because it's something that I really have a passionate interest for. Comedy is entertainment," he said. "When it comes to the people who do it, even the most successful person in comedy, any of those guys will tell you, you do not go into it to make money. You do it because you have this drive to be on stage and it makes you feel good."

We see everything in this weird filter, and we like to get it out of our heads and hopefully make people laugh."

North Shore and Chicago residents can learn more about the monthly comedy series through "The Alley's Stand-Up and Comedy Sketch Night" Facebook page. The next stand-up and open mic night will take place on Thursday, March 19 at 8:30 p.m.