



Riverbend Comedy Series: Local business owner adding comedy shows to local renaissance

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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WOOD RIVER – Many people believe the Riverbend area is in something of a cultural renaissance, including Modified Auto Sound owner and stand-up comedy enthusiast, Shawn Fowler.

Fowler founded the Riverbend Comedy Series as a way to help this new movement of local business and culture toward the East Alton and Wood River areas. He said the #OurAlton push for the Small Business Revolution was something of a new beacon for other communities. He also cited the recent development plans for the Eastgate Plaza area of East Alton as the reason for the newfound pride in the area and overall growth. To contribute to that, Fowler plans on hosting both national and local comedy acts in the East Alton and Wood River areas in the near future.

A fan of stand-up comedy himself, Fowler said he used to attend the old Funny Bone in Fairview Heights, starting with nights in which free tickets were offered to bring a crowd into the doors for amateur or open mic nights. He said he developed a love of stand-up and eventually went to everything from open mic nights to nationally touring acts.

So, when he wanted to improve morale with the hard-working staff at Modified Auto Sound, he sought a way for everyone to gather outside of work and enjoy something together. That something became stand-up comedy at Hey Guys Comedy Club in Fairview Heights.

“I called them to see if they had any tickets to give away for a Thursday night or something, just to get some people into the door,” Fowler said. “A week later, they had a showcase and said we could bring as many people as we'd like, and I instantly fell in love with stand-up comedy all over again. I started dragging everyone with me weekly. I went to open mics, saw amateurs and headliners. I even wanted to do it personally. I didn't have any experience in it, so I inundated myself into it and became friends with the owners.”

By July 4, 2018, Hey Guys Comedy Club had shut its doors forever. Fowler said that closing hit him hard, because he felt like he was at home there and loved seeing the comedy showcases. He also said he did not like the atmosphere of St. Louis, and preferred to stay on the Illinois side of the river. With his favorite club closed, however, Fowler almost seemed out of options – so he started booking his own shows.

Fowler's first comedy show was on Aug. 25, 2018, at Bluff City Grill. He booked Jeremy Nunes, who does a clean act he refers to as “Front Porch Comedy.” Nunes was featured in Last Comic Standing 2 as well as the film, “The Break Up,” and a PBS mini-series. He hails from Southern Illinois. That show brought more than 300 people through the doors, letting Fowler know there was an audience for what he wanted to bring to the area.

An upcoming show on Oct. 6 at Madison's Tea Room in Wood River is called “Hey Gals,” and Fowler said it will feature a collection of female comics from across the region. Headliner Christine Stedman got her start doing stand-up in the Metro East and placed fifth in Nick at Nite's Search for the Funniest Mom in America.

Supporting acts for that show include Jamie Fritz and Amber Davidson, who is a graduate of East Alton Wood River High School.

“She's a phenomenal local comic,” Fowler said of Davidson. “She's going to be performing in her hometown.”

Another show will be announced soon for the middle of November, which will feature a comedian who helped found the Blue Collar Comedy Tour and was part of Larry the Cable Guy's act and cross-country tour.

Fowler is also seeking local businesses willing to sponsor some of these shows, he said. Businesses interested in that may reach out to him on Facebook or through the Riverbend Comedy Series Facebook Page. As of now, several area businesses, including Cost Cutters Auto Sales, Bulletproof Works Printing and Graphics, AP Cigar Company of Rosewood Heights and Mississippi Sound House have sponsored these upcoming comedy showcases.