

Knock. Knock. Who's there?

Comedy club opens its doors

By TERI MADDOX
News-Democrat

Three hospital employees walk into a bar, and the next thing you know, Fairview Heights has a comedy club.

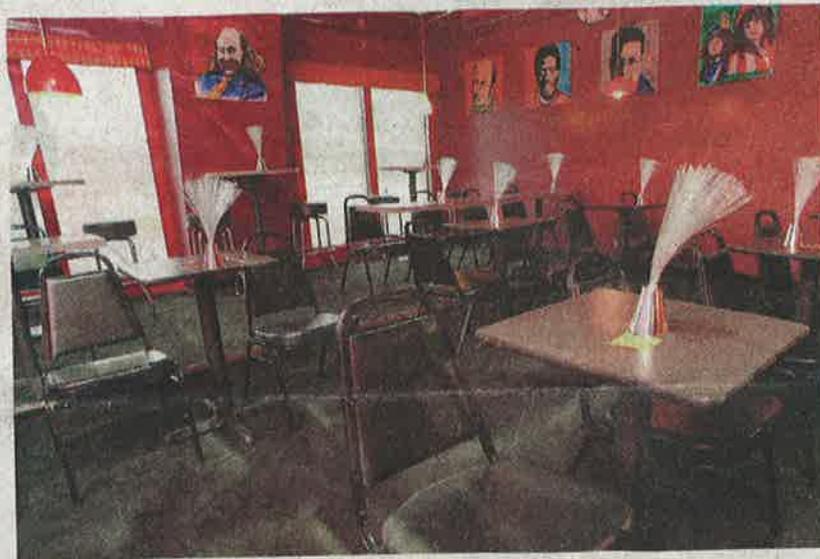
Hey Guys Comedy Club is opening Friday in Chateau Plaza along Illinois 159.

"I'm delighted," said mall owner Vernon Dulaney, 58, of rural Caseyville. "Fairview Heights has always had a comedy club, and the other one has been closed for a while. So I think it's a good thing for the area."

Dulaney was referring to Comedy Etc. II, which closed two years ago after the Ramada Inn's new owner declined to renew its lease.

Hey Guys is owned by Bruce Veach and Shelbie Wohlstadter, who met while working at Veterans Administration hospitals in St. Louis; and Bruce's friend, Alex Bacchetti, a retired hospital administrator, and his wife, Shireen.

"I looked over his business plan, and it just seemed like something



Hey Guys Comedy Club seats 266 people. Each table has an LED light with a bouquet of fiber-optic strands that can be used to summon wait staff.

kind of interesting to do," said Bacchetti, 48, of Naperville, formerly of O'Fallon. "It's fun, something a little different (than other investments)."

Veach has moonlighted as a stand-up comedian for nearly 30 years. He

also has published a book, "Folks Love Chicken Wings: And 99 Other Semi Proven Facts."

The comedy club's full name is Hey Guys, I Like Talking to You.

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AT A GLANCE

Stand-up comedy: Headliner Dean Schardan with featured act Mark Morfrey and emcee Greg McClintock

Where: Hey Guys Comedy Club, 5225 N. Illinois St. in Fairview Heights (Chateau Plaza)

When: 8 and 10 p.m. Friday and 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday

Admission: \$15 for early show or \$12 for late show (\$2.50 more for preferred seating)

Tickets: Guaranteed seating only at heyguyscomedy.com

Reservations: Call 618-416-6434 (guaranteed only if tickets don't sell out online)

Handicap-accessible: Yes

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Veach began signing off with the line years ago while performing at Comedy Etc. II.

"Art Vieluf, who owned the comedy club, said, 'That's a great line. You should end all your shows with it,'" said Veach, 49, of Belleville.

Veach helped Wohlstadter get "Resilient Heart," her book of poems, published in 2012. The following year, they became full-blown business partners.

They quit their hospital jobs (Veach was a surgical education manager, and Wohlstadter was a medical records analyst) and started producing comedy shows to help non-profit groups, families and friends raise money for good causes.

"I knew that Bruce was a strong enough comedian,"

The partners produced nearly 20 comedy shows but ran into problems. Groups often couldn't find reasonably priced venues.

Hey Guys is designed to provide a place for fundraisers on Thursday nights, regular comedy shows on Fridays and Saturdays and eventually open-mike nights on Wednesdays.

"I'm excited," said Vieluf, 61, of Fairview Heights. "I'm happy that someone I know is doing this. I'm glad to see it fall into good hands."

Comedian Dean Schardan will headline shows Friday and Saturday, with featured act Mark Morfrey and emcee Greg McClintock.

The comedy club seats 266 people in a 4,500-square-foot space that formerly housed Cupids Steakhouse and Baxter's Sports Bar.

"I hope this won't be the former location of Hey Guys Comedy Club," Veach said, laughing. "Hopefully, it will

lights salvaged from the old S.S. Admiral in St. Louis, and tables and chairs from Comedy Etc. II.

Each table has an LED light with a bouquet of fiber-optic strands that can be used to summon wait staff.

"We want to reduce chatter," Wohlstadter said. "So if you need another drink or a napkin, you can turn on the light to get your waitress's attention."

Walls are lined with portraits of famous comedians, courtesy of Vieluf. They used to hang in Comedy Etc. II.

Hey Guys will serve beer, wine and cocktails, as well as light appetizers such as jalapeno poppers, chicken wings, mozzarella sticks and pretzel bites.

"We have one way to cook, and that's a deep fryer," Veach said. "If it's not deep-fried, you can't get it here."

Upcoming comedy shows will feature Dustin

known as Willis on "Diffrent Strokes" and Monk on "Everybody Hates Chris," in September; and comedy mainstay Bob Nelson in October.

Hey Guys is available for fundraisers on Thursdays. Non-profit groups, friends and families receive all proceeds collected at the door.

"It beats washing cars on a 100-degree day," Veach said. "It beats selling gift wrap that no one wants."