



## Chicago Comic's Standup Act Not Part of His Merrill Lynch Gig

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By Danielle Cerrachio

**Bill Bunker**, marketing director for Merrill Lynch Capital in Chicago, spent a night last month working at a comedy show with Dave Chappelle. Yet, his supervisor, MD **Dan Marszalek**, said few of Mr. Bunker's colleagues would guess he is a standup comic if nobody told them.

"It's a very well-kept secret," Mr. Marszalek said. "He is not doing his routine in the office or trying to steal the limelight in terms of talk time in meetings. He keeps it pretty separate."

Mr. Bunker got started in comedy seven years ago, when he decided to enroll in a comedy class near his home in Chicago. "Even after the class was over, I just kind of stuck with it and hung around the club more," he said. As his appetite for comedy remained, he increasingly received more performance time at the club, called Zanies, and his family, friends and Merrill Lynch co-workers came to see him.



**Bill Bunker**

Director **Mark Gertzof**, who has attended Mr. Bunker's shows, said, "Bill has a dry sense of humor and a kind of self-deprecating style. He speaks about his daily life, about working and his kids and driving a minivan. It's pretty funny."

Mr. Bunker spoke of a joke he sometimes uses to start the show. "I talk about how I got a new car, how I'm real happy... I just bought myself a brand new Dodge Caravan. Then I tell people that you know people do make fun of you if you get a minivan, but if you get some of the extras on then these days they aren't really that bad of a car. Like I just got mine straight from the factory with the word LOSER already detailed on the side panel." By beginning in this way, Mr. Bunker said he is able to establish his personality and the general tone of his routine.

Mr. Gertzof recalled that the first time a group from the office went to see him, "We started chanting his last name, to which he replied, 'Wow, it's a wild crowd, there must be a lot of bankers out there.'"

Today, Mr. Bunker juggles his job at Merrill Lynch, his family life and his expanding comedic career. Besides occasional weeklong gigs at Zanies, Mr. Bunker performs in other regional clubs and brings along his family when he does sporadic acts in other cities. Recently, Mr. Bunker was on the West Coast to assist a new franchise finance group started by Merrill Lynch Capital, which is part of a division of Merrill Lynch Bank USA. At the prodding of his colleagues, he called the local comedy club there and got a last minute opportunity to perform for one night.

Mr. Bunker claims the greatest accomplishment thus far of "this hobby of mine," as he has called it, was his participation in the Wendy's Comedy Challenge last October. In a nationwide contest sponsored by the restaurant chain and comedian Ellen DeGeneres, he advanced to join the top 15 finalists.



**On stage at Zanies Comedy Club in Chicago**

In May, Mr. Bunker was booked to work at Zanies when the club manager called to say that Dave Chappelle was in town and was going to replace him that night. Still, Mr. Bunker, an avid fan of the popular comedian, showed up at Zanies to see the performance. The club was full, but Mr. Chappelle was running late and Mr. Bunker was asked to start the show. "It was a good thing I got thrust into it so quickly," Mr. Bunker stated. "It was only until after the fact that I realized how nervous I should have been."

Mr. Chappelle arrived and completed the first of his two performances scheduled for that night. Mr. Bunker took advantage of the time between shows to introduce himself and ended up opening the later show for Mr. Chappelle as well. The two spent time together afterward "with local celebrities and reporters," Mr. Bunker said.

That night at Zanies, Mr. Bunker saw how an audience reacts to a comedian voted No. 43 on Comedy Central's 100 Greatest Standups of All Time. "Clearly, he's the biggest name in comedy right now," Mr. Bunker said later.

When he asked Mr. Chappelle how he would like to be introduced to the audience, the comedian responded that most likely no introduction was necessary, because the crowd was ready for him. Sure enough, the club went crazy when Mr. Bunker attempted an introduction.

"It's kind of a strange experience to open for someone that famous," Mr. Bunker said of his own comedic performance that night. "You look at him and realize his life is so strange, with tons of people he doesn't even know coming up to him and pestering him. You begin to think it's not such a bad thing to do standup in obscurity. It makes it interesting to do that all night and then check back into work the next day to deal with day-to-day tasks and a regular job."