

# Standing Up For Stand-Up

By Kitty Merrill

If you love stand-up comedy and you've got the dough, you can see lots of headline acts on Long Island this summer. But when it comes to checking out the up-and-comers, Long Island's been lacking. Or at least it was until last summer, when Paul Anthony organized the Island's first comedy festival.

Sales manager at WALK radio by day and comic by night, Anthony recalled that back in the heyday of stand-up on

Long Island, during the '80s and '90s, there were close to a dozen full-time comedy clubs. Over the years, they've been whittled down to just one or two.

"When I started doing stand-up comedy, I learned very quickly there were not a lot of venues on Long Island," Anthony recalled. Winner of the 2005 Huntington Arts Council's Laff-Off competition, Anthony is the official opening act for Long Island's Psychic Jeffrey Wands.

Last year Anthony decided to put together a comedy festival geared toward showcasing the talent of new local comedians. The response was so positive, he's at it again this year.

Most major cities have comedy festivals, he explained. They generally run about a week and include a variety of venues. Since Long Island is 120 miles long, with occasionally different sensibilities depending on the community, Anthony chose to mount the festival all summer long. Some 30 different comics will rotate through 15 shows. Each



Independent / Courtesy Rick Portes

Event organizer Paul Anthony poses outside the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall. On Saturday, the second annual Long Island Comedy Festival, a summer-long celebration of stand-up comedy, kicks off at the historic Riverhead venue.

show will spotlight five comedians and show support of Long Island's historic theaters.

On the East End, the Vail-Leavitt Music Hall will be the site for the Festival's opening night this Saturday (show time: 8 p.m.). A second show will be held at the Riverhead theater in July, and the Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center will present the festival on July 5.

Touted as the largest comedy festival ever presented on the Island, the Long Island Comedy Festival may also be the most economical. Tickets begin at just \$25 for a 90-minute show. Anthony credited theater officials with helping to keep ticket prices down.

"We're looking to reverse the decline of comedy performances here and bring the art of live stand-up comedy back to Long Island," Anthony said.

The festival's mission is threefold: first, to bring stand-up comedy back to Long Island; second, give up-and-coming comics the chance to showcase their talents to Long Island audiences; and third, to support the Island's not-for-profit theaters and the downtowns where they're located.

"Having most of our shows presented on the stages of Long Island's great historic theaters adds to the excitement and credibility of the Comedy Festival," Anthony added.

Check the festival's website for a complete listing of performances.

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