Local comedians will take a stand

■ Twenty stand-up comics are scheduled to perform in Eugene's fifth annual Laff-Off this weekend

By Rory Carroll

Everyone's a comedian - in their dreams.

That's Comedy Workout director Leigh Anne Jasheway's princi-ple behind Laff-Off 2000, the amstand-up comic competition slated for Saturday at the Actor's Cabaret in Eugene.

"Many people harbor this dream of doing stand-up," Jasheway said. "I think people see it as, 'If I can do this, I can do anything.' It's very empowering.'

For the fifth consecutive year, 20 comics will be chasing their dream of bringing home first prize. All proceeds will benefit Greenhill Humane Society's Domestic Violence Prevention Pro-

Twenty comics will vie for the title of "Eugene's Funniest Person." Each comic has five minutes to impress a panel of celebrity judges, which includes such local stars as Comic News publisher Don Kahle, Slug Queen Carmen Slugana, Register-Guard columnist Bob Welch and Stone Soup cartoonist Jan Eliot.

The competitors are aware that the Laff-Off is serious competi-

"The Laff-Off is different because of the time limit," said 1999 champion Jason Kronholm. "Because each comic only has five minutes, everyone has to use their best stuff.'

The victor owns bragging rights, a plastic crown and emcees the following year's event. Kronholm will emcee Saturday night.

Variety is a strength of the Laff-Off. Comics ranging in age from 16 to 65 will attempt everything from music to puppet shows to gain the favor of the judges.

'Nowhere else can you see 20 comics at a time," Jasheway says. "The beauty of that is that if there are three you just can't stand, you're bound to find seven who you think are fabulous.'

The Laugh-Off originated when professional comic Mike Jenkins did a comedy benefit for a food bank in Portland. He wanted Laff-Offs across Oregon so the winners could compete for the title of "Funniest Person in Oregon." To Jashaway's delight, Eugene's first Laff-Off sold out — as it has every year since. Other Oregon cities, however, were not as taken by the Laff-Off as Eugene was, and a state Laff-Off competition flopped. Jasheway decided to continue the Laff-Off in Eugene independently.

Jasheway attributes the success of the annual Laff-Off to Eugene's diversity and oddness.

Unfortunately Eugene is not ethnically diverse, but we're diverse in other ways," Jasheway says. "I think Eugene is the type of place where people live for a while and then move on, so we have a lot of geographic diversity. One of our comics is from New Jersey, and he sounds like a member of the mafia," Jasheway added jokingly.

Jashaway follows Jenkins' example by continuing to donate Laff-Off proceeds to charity. The Greenhill Humane Society's Domestic Violence Prevention Program is an organization that provides a home for pets when

domestic violence breaks up a relationship. According to Jasheway, women will stay in a rela-tionship out of fear of what will happen to the animal if it is left behind. Greenhill allows her to make her decision - stay or go without having to worry about what to do with the pet, Jasheway

"I chose Greenhill because they are one of the best humane societies in the country, and at the same time they benefit people," Jashaway said. Greenhill has been their charity ever since.

Sally Sheklow, a member of local improv comedy troupe WYM-PROV!, is one of this year's celebrity judges. She sees the benefit as a positive aspect of the Laff-Off.

'Because it's a benefit, there is a spirit of, 'We're all here because we believe in something," she said. "It creates an automatic camaraderie within the audience."

Jasheway believes the Laff-Off will continue to be a success because of the support of both participants and audiences. Many competitors who have never placed in first return with hopes of taking the crown, she said.

"People keep coming back until they win," Jashaway said, adding that the Laff-Off will continue to elicit aspiring comics.

"How many people would even entertain the idea of, say, taxidermy as a hobby? But a lot of people want to try comedy," Jashaway said. "Also, it allows the people in the audience to think, 'I'm funny too,' and look at how many funny people there are and how different they are.'

Tickets are \$12.50, and reservations are recommended. Call 693-4368 for reservations.

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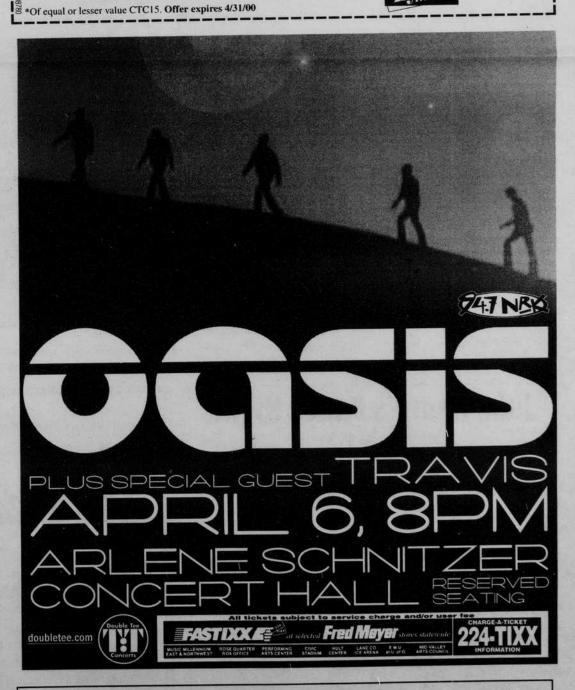
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