
NEWS

Comic hopes his past can change his future

By Penny Coles, Niagara Advance
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Joe Pillitteri is portraying his father Vince, and Joe's son Johnny is Joe as a 10-year-old, in his comedy sketch about growing up on the family farm.

Joe Pillitteri is a funny guy.

So far, the business owner by day, stand-up comic by night has only used his talent to help others, appearing as master of ceremonies or funny-man for a host of fundraising events across Niagara, asking nothing for himself.

Now, he's asking for help from his fans.

Pillitteri has produced a short video for CBC's Comedy Coup, a country-wide contest that uses social media audiences to vote for comedy show concepts. The last comic left standing is given \$500,000 in production financing to create a half-hour special for CBC. Monday was the day the video submissions would be narrowed down to 100, and his video was 10th, so now the fun, and the work, begins.

Pillitteri's concept is Fruit Farm, based on his own adventures growing up on the farm, with, as he describes his youth, "a foul-mouthed Italian immigrant father and an overly religious Scottish immigrant mother."

He's performed one particular routine so often he wouldn't mind retiring it at this point, he says, but he knew from audience reactions, wherever he performed it, that it was a good choice for the first video to be submitted to Comedy Coup.

It's about Joe as a 10-year-old, being told by his dad that he's in charge of spraying pesticides in the orchard.

"It's got some language in it," he says, but that's what working for my father on the farm was like, and we know the concept is funny."

The Comedy Coup process is turning out to be interesting for Pillitteri - in addition to revisiting his past, a "surreal experience," he's finding it helpful to be forced to focus on his future, and whether he can turn his talent into something more than a way to give back to his community.

"It makes you think about not only what's funny, but can you make it work with actors and a script, and can you turn something that's a stand-up act into something that is funny to audiences across Canada. This process forces you to do something about that."

For the next 10 weeks, ending Dec. 10, audiences will be asked to use Twitter and Facebook accounts to vote for their favorites, with teams of three. Pillitteri has a videographer and a marketer creating new content each week to further develop their concept.

The idea, says Pillitteri, is not only to be funny, but to be able to "hit the ground running" with a team in place to produce and market their concept.

Five teams will eventually be chosen to pitch their projects to a panel of industry professionals, with the finalist being moved on to production of a half-hour CBC prime time special to be ready by the fall of 2015.

To watch Pillitteri's videos, including the 90-second trailer, and vote for him, visit <http://comedycoup.cbc.ca/fruit-farm>.

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