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## NEWS

# Comic 'begging' for votes

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Comic Joe Pillitteri is hoping people will register and vote for his Fruit Farm on CBC's Comedy Coup online contest, to help him win a \$500,000 production deal for his sitcom concept - life growing up on the family farm. Playing Joe as a youngster is his Johnny. Photo submitted

The funny man who has contributed so much locally is now begging for help.

"If we didn't sound like we were begging before," says comic Joe Pillitteri, "we are begging now. We're down to the crunch and we really need every last bit of support we can get. Friends, family, kids - whoever - we need help."

Pillitteri, known around the region for donating his time as an entertainer to fundraisers, is in the running to win 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. The current online voting period is this weekend, to move from the top 55 to the top 15.



"We're desperate for 50 or even 100 more people or so to sign up and vote," says Pillitteri.

The last round of fan voting ends Sunday, Nov. 9, and will decide the top 15 - then it's up to CBC producers to narrow it to the final five.

The five remaining comics will pitch their projects to a panel of industry professionals, with the finalist moving on to production of a half-hour CBC prime time special to be ready by the fall of 2015.

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

Voters are asked to register, and use Twitter and Facebook accounts to vote for their favorite teams of three (Pillitteri has a videographer and a marketer).

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, and this weekend is all about reaching out to audiences through Twitter, Facebook and a live comedy event at Pillitteri Estate Winery Friday.

The event was sold out - but Pillitteri is still asking for help with voting to keep him in the lineup for the final round of producer judging.

"As we move along with this project, we're more convinced than ever this will work. There are so many awesome settings in Niagara, so many awesome stories and so many awesome characters and angles - we know it can be funny and we know it will appeal to people right across the country."

Pillitteri says this project, and the work that has gone into it, "has been the best thing in the world for me."

The script he's written for the project has been very well-received by people he considers to be good judges of what is funny, he said.

"Now all of a sudden I realize the act I've visualized all along really works. If this contest doesn't end the way we hope, something else will come along. This work will not be for naught - one way or another we'll be parlaying it into something else."

But at the moment, he says, "we really like our prospects for moving on. I'm thrilled to be where we are."

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

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