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Rockland's King of Comedy

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Adam Oliensis took a long time to find his funny bone. When this one-time linguistics philosophy major turned Broadway producer turned 50, he decided against a Corvette, and started doing standup instead.



"I had never done it and always wanted to," he says. "That, and I have a pathological attraction to risk."

The challenge was not, however, gathering up the courage to stand up and tell a few jokes in a dark room full of strangers, he says, but finding a place in which to do it.

"Having a place for comedy is huge," he says. "The ideal for comedy is to find a sacred place, a profane place actually. It has to be a profane place for crossing taboos to feel right. To me that's a large part of it."

After checking the Yellow Pages and making a few calls, Oliensis realized that Rockland was something of a comedy wasteland.

"Every number I found was closed, and maybe there was a reason for that," he says. "Or maybe Rockland is just an underserved market."



Seeing an opportunity, he enlisted fellow comic Jamie Rosen, who lives in Tarrytown, and started LoHud HiDef Comedy in October. Since then, they've done monthly shows at The Turning Point with headliners such as "Last Comic Standing's" Jessica Kirson and Mike Vecchione. Ted Alexandro, who has done Letterman, Conan and Jimmy Kimmel, was here on Jan. 15.

The showcase has expanded to Westchester, too, and Oliensis ultimately hopes to have four different shows running each month.

"The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive," he says. "It's like people are thirsty for this kind of show to be local. They feel more connected to it. It's like a home game in sports. There's a sense of ownership and connection that reminds me of Green Bay Packers fans — the local level of enthusiasm is off the hook (which is a good thing!)"

Oliensis and Rosen each do a stand-up routine before the headliners take the stage.

And though he says he's "not always as overwhelmed by hysterical laughter as one would fantasize," Rosen disagrees.

"Adam is a very good stand-up," she says. "He's very funny, if you're married, with kids and are over 40, and that's a pretty large audience, especially out here."

So far, all of LoHud HiDef's shows have sold out, and Oliensis and Rosen believe the trend will continue. "There are a couple local guys who are New York City names that we're booking, like Johnny Lampert and Pete Dominick," says Oliensis, "and some local comics who are less well known."

"We keep our eyes open for what we think are really great talents and that's what we want to bring here," says Rosen.

"The people who have blown our socks off, that's who we want to showcase," Rosen adds.

In the meantime, here are 10 other things you probably never realized about Adam Oliensis. Maybe some will blow your socks off.

1. He made good use of his college thesis: "I have a degree in linguistic philosophy — my thesis was a study of how Wittgenstein would analyze Kant's Metaphysics of Ethics. "And it was so boring that for years I used to try to read it rather than take sleeping pills. I never was able to get through the whole thing."
2. Don't bump into him in a dark alley: "I studied martial arts for 15 years. But it did not make me tough enough to endure the slow chipping away of self-esteem that comes with being a husband and a father."
3. He loves living in Rockland: "Because of the economic downturn, my real-estate taxes are now higher than my income."
4. He's part of a famous family: "I am a direct descendant of the Vilna Gaon (11th generation), a Lithuanian rabbi of great renown."
5. He wrote a movie with one half of "Two and a Half Men." Oliensis and Jon Cryer wrote the 1996 film "Pompatus of Love," the story of four guys discussing women and the meaning of "pompatus," a made-up word that's found in two Steve Miller songs. Both Oliensis and Cryer starred in the film, along with Adrian Pasdar, Jennifer Tilley and Kristin Scott-Thomas.
6. He's a LeBron James wanne-be: "If I could do anything at all as 'work' I would still rather be a professional athlete than anything else. Or else a playwright."
7. Yes, you can call him a "Nutcracker Dad." "Our two elder daughters are in the RYDE (Rockland Youth Dance Ensemble) Nutcracker every year."
8. He's a record holder: As the producing director of Willow Cabin Theatre Co. in New York City, Oliensis produced, "Wilder, Wilder, Wilder," the only show in history to go from off-off Broadway to off-Broadway to Broadway in a single season. He was nominated for both a Tony and Drama Desk Award for Producer, Best Revival in 1993.
9. He used to want to "do something remarkable" with his life: "Turns out I have, with my wife: our four kids."
10. Why he traded the bright lights of Broadway for comedy: "I love the rapport, and the laughs that emerge in real time from that. In comedy, the fun part is trying to assess the moment, so when you bomb, live and onstage, the audience can't fake their reaction. It's the ultimate interactive experience."