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Lansing cop busts up audiences - with laughter
State police officer's comedy act draws on 'day job' humor

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At 9 p.m. Saturday, the warm-up comedian's act was coming to a close, and for Dwayne Gill it was showtime.

He was the feature act at Chaplin's Comedy Club in Clinton Township, north of Detroit. Gill, a four-year comedy veteran, had spent the past three days at the club in pursuit of his dream of becoming a full-time comic.

The dream is a departure from his day job, which is far more serious. From 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., he's known as Sgt. Dwayne Gill, a Michigan State Police shift supervisor.

He served as a beat cop in Ann Arbor, a state trooper in Ionia and was part of the governor's security detail. He guides the next generation of state cops at the state police Lansing post.

But shortly after 9:05 p.m., Gill took the stage, took a breath and took the microphone.

It was time to laugh.

"Wow, this is a great-looking crowd - some of you anyways," Gill said, drawing a hearty chuckle, a good start to an evening.

Gill, of Lansing, then launched into a bevy of police stories from his first state police assignment in Ionia, where the Detroit native asked a farmer what color his stolen John Deere tractor was (ALWAYS green and yellow), to a batty speeding driver who, after being stopped, claimed he was rushing home because he was a vampire and had to get home before dawn.

The crowd ate it up.

As Gill's routine continued, a noticeable trend emerged: The four-letter words that flood other comedians' routines only dotted Gill's.

"One of the big reasons why you want to be clean, I was told a long time ago by a club owner, is that clean leads to green," Gill said after the show. "The cleaner you are, the more money you can make.

"It's very much more challenging to write clean. Anybody can do a dirty joke; it takes talent to do a clean joke."

Not only is Gill clean, he's funny.

He won the title of "World's Funniest Cop" during a police convention in 2006 in Albuquerque, N.M. He has shared the stage with comedians Louie Anderson and Emo Phillips and was on the TV show "America's Dumbest Criminals."

"He has risen very fast through the ranks of comedy," said Frank Stevens, the owner of Connxtions Comedy Club in Lansing. "Most cops don't have that sense of humor."

If a comedian's skill is measured in stage time and bookings, Saturday was a good night.

"A feature act is booked for 20 minutes," said Chaplin's manager, Bill Hargis. "If they're good, we'll let them stray a minute or two over. If they're bad, they won't last 15 minutes."

Gill clocked in at 27 minutes.

He already has been invited back to Chaplin's for at least three more shows in June.

Later in the night, the audience was filing out of the club, and the crowd for the 10:30 p.m. show started trickling in. As Gill readied for the house lights to dim one more time, he reflected on his dream, how far he had come, and how far he still has to go.

"Being on stage is my home," Gill said. "I just want to be good, to make people laugh."

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