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A cop walks into a bar...

Michigan State Police Sgt. Dwayne Gill tours with comedy act

By [ADAM LARK](#)

Dwayne Gill doesn't wear his bulletproof vest on stage. He doesn't bring his gun, either. A 13-year Michigan State Police veteran by day and full-time stand-up comedian by night, Sgt. Dwayne Gill has learned to balance jokes with citations, punchlines with Miranda rights and stage lights with flashing lights.

At a January police conference in New Mexico, Gill won the title of "World's Funniest Cop" as voted on by the more than 500 police colleagues in attendance.

But Gill said his life as a comedian doesn't interfere with his tough cop alter ego. "I'm a good cop and the funny cop," Gill said. "I'm the kind of cop you want to have stop you. You tell me a joke, I'll probably let you go." And like always, Gill is joking.

Humor is no stranger to Gill— he's been on the comedy scene since 1993. He can be found supervising his squad and working the phones at the State Police's Lansing Post on North Canal Road from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., a daily grind Gill describes as "rigid."

"On stage I'm a different person," said Gill. "As soon as I get out there I let myself go."

Lt. Eric Johnson has seen Gill in both roles. After catching one of Gill's December performances at Connxtions Comedy Club in Lansing, Johnson said he liked what he saw. "A sense of humor is one thing that a police officer lacks," Johnson explained. "It's a long day and always difficult to fit it in. "Dwayne is masterful at balancing it all out."

No matter how funny or outlandish Gill's act is, Johnson prefers the Dwayne in uniform. "I always tell him to stick to his day job," remarked Johnson with a hint of laughter. "That is, unless that big offer comes along."

Let's Start the Show

It's not "The Tonight Show," "Premium Blend" or an HBO comedy special — it's Jack's Waterfront Restaurant attached to a Spring Lake Holiday Inn.

The stage is a carpeted 8-foot-by-8-foot square platform rising 3 feet above the bar's parquet dance floor. The multi-colored overhead spotlights shine bright on Gill's forehead, prompting Gill to utter, "What are they tryin' to do, bake a brother?"

Welcome to the life of an up-and-coming comedian.

Gill, however, is too busy to think about his opening act and the crammed bar packed with more than 150 patrons. He's fiddling with a camcorder on top of a tripod, somewhat befuddled about what cord goes into which wall outlet.

"This is my game tape," Gill says with a smile.

Just as every comic wishes for their big break, Gill hopes his video recordings could be classified as a highlight reel someday. But for now it's all about breaking down and analyzing his act.

"I'll look at this tape afterwards and see what I need to improve on," Gill said. "If it's a good show I'll convert the footage to my computer and have my publicist send video clips to potential clubs looking for some talent. "My comedy coach always told me to get good and get seen. I'm getting good, all I need to do is get seen."

After glancing at the audience — a relatively enthusiastic crowd of 20-somethings — Gill makes his way to the back of the restaurant to be introduced on stage. "Here come the jitters," jokes Gill while pretending to pace nervously.

"A Milk Dud in Jeans"

"Good to be here in Spring Lake, Michigan. Obviously, my career's taking off," Gill quips. After proclaiming himself tomorrow's Wayne Brady and describing his appearance as a "Milk Dud in jeans," Gill goes on to joke about his experiences as a police officer.

But the crowd has yet to warm up to his style.

Gill changes subjects.

"So any Catholics in the house? We got any Catholics?"

Only one person enthusiastically shouts "Wooh... Catholics!"

Gill doesn't panic.

"Alright, we got one guy really excited about being Catholic. I'm excited too. Have all you guys heard about the new Pope? I felt bad about the old Pope and the way he was having it. It kind of reminded me of an old movie I saw a while ago, it was called Weekend at Bernie's."

Shocked laughter progresses into genuine laughter. Gill wins the audience over.

During his 25-minute opening act, Gill explores a variety of topics.

The rarity of a cop-comedian: "A cop as a comedian is about as rare as a crackhead with a checking account, it just don't happen every day."

Entertaining the troops: "I actually just got back from entertaining the troops. Isn't that awesome? It was Cub Scout Troop 667 from Ionia. They some bad little kids man, bad little kids."

And the obligatory Lions joke: "It's good to be from Michigan. You know we don't have to worry about floods. We ain't got to worry about hurricanes, we ain't got to worry about tsunamis. The only natural disaster we have to worry about is the Detroit Lions."

The "Best Part"

After the show, lounging on a barstool, Gill is joined by friends from the State Police Academy. For officer Mike Harvitt, a former recruit with Gill, seeing the show is nothing new. "This was the first time I've ever seen him on stage," Harvitt said. "That guy's been a comedian ever since I first met him. This is all very inevitable."

Cradling a bottle of Bud Light in one hand, Gil uses the other to tell stories about life on the force. "The best part about this are the after-show drinks," Gill said. In a couple months, with Gill's hectic schedule, Spring Lake will be a distant memory. Grand Rapids and Livonia are the next two destinations on his extensive travel log.

The booming voice of Ken Sevara, the headlining comedian, can be heard thumping into the bass of the bar's speakers. Sevara's hassling a guy who has five female companions at his table.

"Hey man how'd you get to know all of these women?" Sevara asks. Gill interrupts his conversation with his old comrades and without skipping a beat shouts triumphantly "He knows Dwayne!"

Half joking and half serious, Gill sums up his dual cop-comedian persona: "All I'm saying is that I'd rather take laughter than a bullet."