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Alexandria lobbyist "The funniest thing since Seinfeld"

By MARY CLAIRE
KENDALL

One day, Dave Werner's Alexandria neighbors will marvel that such a gifted musical comedian/political satirist lived in their midst. Sometimes referred to as Mark Russell with a guitar, Werner is a nationally sought-after talent who performs regularly for groups across the political, professional, and civic spectrum.

Since 1995, when Washington-based Leading Authorities Speakers Bureau began representing him, Werner has appeared before almost 1000 groups ranging from The American Bar Association to The Gypsum Institute to the Pressure-Sensitive Tape Council at their meetings and conferences in Hawaii, Manhattan, Aspen, Colorado, Dubuque, Iowa, and places in-between.

And, it's little wonder he's so popular. "The funniest thing since Seinfeld," says Jayna Bonfini of the American Academy of Dermatology, after Dave appeared at their spring legislative conference this year. The consensus among everyone I spoke with was that he tailors his humor to each group's particular concerns and really knows how to make people laugh.

Who would know better than Brett Leake, with Tonight Show and Improv credits to his name, who had this to say of his fellow comedian: "Yikes! Where did this guy come from? In November 2002, he opened for me at the Old Town Theater and turned my solo act into a two man, one man show that peaked one man too soon. Formerly of The Capitol Steps and too funny to be a lawyer, too, this former attorney is really, really good. Really good."

Actually, Werner is still a working attorney, now consulting with fellow former Capitol Stepper Dave Gencarelli from their lobby shop located just a short walk from the Cannon House Office Building. He tells me, "I'm on the Hill most days, and it's sometimes only a short step



Dave Werner

from politics to satire."

Like politics, the essential part of comedy is tension, which is then relieved. Dave's gift for using that tension is always in evidence, as follows: So, "What's the secret of Dave Werner? What's wrapped inside all this comedy?," I asked in my umpteenth attempt to understand the essential Dave. "The secret of Dave Werner... No one's ever asked that before... I'd tell you, but it's a secret... I enjoy living in Alexandria, I'll tell you that."

That this Iowa born and bred, Yale-educated lawyer has chosen Alexandria as his home is key to his humor, reflecting as it does this more genteel part of the country - in contrast to the angst-driven humor that is the stock-in-trade of most comedians. For, Werner is relatively fair, balanced and low key, honing more closely to Bob Newhart's style as described by writer Lawrence J. Epstein in a recent PBS American Masters: "He hit his targets hard but they didn't even realize it." Case in comparative point: "Fair and balanced, that's my new slogan," quips Werner. Zing!

Such finely crafted humor (his impressions of Bill Clinton and Johnny Carson are so perfectly dead-on, it's scary) had Tim Russert reacting with a thumbs up and "good stuff," when he saw Werner perform at a political comedy event in New Hampshire.

But, the fruits of the comic grist mill haven't come easy. Like Steve

Winner of a "funniest lawyer in Washington" contest, he's been called "too funny to be a lawyer."

Martin and so many successful comedians, he started out as a "humor appreciator" - watching and admiring comedians, telling and listening to jokes at family gatherings, and participating in high school music and drama. Only later did he start following and studying the late night comedians very carefully - frame by video frame in the case of Carson. During law school, he performed in the satirical Yale Law Revue and even took a year off to work and attend the comedy clubs in New York and LA.

After winning a "Funniest Lawyer in Washington" contest as a working lawyer at a DC firm, he set his sights on becoming a professional comedian - a goal he says he achieved "gradually, then all at once." At Open Mike Nights, he learned "it's harder than it looks," joking that during his early Georgetown appearances at the now-defunct Comedy Stop, the sign behind him should have read "The Comedy Stops Here," because there was no comedy happening. To make it happen - distilling a comedic interpretation of personalities and issues in the news - "the comedian creates it," which can be "hard, hard, hard... it's like breaking big rocks into little rocks and then into sand."

Werner's fans across the country hope that he will keep on hitting the rock pile.

For more information on Dave Werner, visit www.leadingauthorities.com.



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