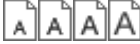




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Friday, November 4, 2005

O.C.: It's a funny place

Some of its best comics will square off Saturday to determine Orange County's funniest person.

By **NIYAZ PIRANI**

The Orange County Register

Question: Why did the chicken cross the road? Answer: to watch the finals of the fourth annual Orange County's Funniest Person contest.

The contest, which began in September with 60 local comedians, will dwindle to the last comic standing from among the nine finalists Saturday night at Martini Blues in Huntington Beach.

Bill Word, creator of the contest, has been booking comedy shows since 1991. Feeling like O.C. was the "forgotten stepsister" of Los Angeles, Word decided to do something about it. Four years ago he created the contest, not only to give O.C. comics a place to perform but to make others aware of local talent as well.

One such talent is Lola Gillebaard, a 75-year-old Laguna Beach woman who is as charming as she is funny.

"I was a schoolteacher for 150 years, and a comedian for the past 30," Gillebaard said. "I think age is in, anyway. I'm just trying to lead the way."

Age, sex or nationality have never been issues. Word simply has one requirement - that the person lives or has lived in Orange County. With many potential participants fitting that description, the competition gets pretty steep.

"The level of competition is hard. There's a lot of diverse people with a lot of different material," Anaheim resident and finalist Randy Simmons said. "You just have to be unique and stand out so people will see you."

Simmons said that although the \$700 top prize is nice, the bragging rights are just about as good. Stardom isn't guaranteed



THEY'RE SERIOUS ABOUT KIDDING: Lola Gillebaard, 75, is among the finalists in organizer Bill Word's bid to find Orange County's funniest person. The competition's finals are Saturday night at Martini Blues in Huntington Beach.

ORANGE COUNTY'S FUNNIEST PERSON

What Finals of competition among local comedians

Where Martini Blues, 5874 Edinger Ave., Huntington Beach

When 8 p.m. Saturday

How much \$15 plus \$10 minimum food or drink order (18 and over, reservations strongly recommended)

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Allison Cohn, a judge for Saturday night's final, is in charge of talent for Comedy Central's "Premium Blend," a comedy show that has featured then-up-and-comers like Wanda Sykes, Kevin Nealon and Mario Cantone.

"It's a good way for me to be introduced to these comics and keep track of them," Cohn said. "That's a big reason I judge this competition."

As always, Word promises a great comedy show but urges people to make reservations before Saturday, because the final round typically sells out.

"Most people when they come are surprised by the talent that lives in O.C.," Word said.

"It's gonna be a hell of a show. For 15 dollars, you're getting a great deal."

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