

Gag orders - Former district attorney Paul D'Angelo chooses laughter over law

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For 11 years, Paul D'Angelo was Essex County's assistant district attorney.

And for nine of those years, he was establishing himself as one of the most well-known stand-up comics in Boston.

"If the job got to me during the day, comedy was a great outlet for me at night," said D'Angelo, who will perform at the Back Page Jazz and Comedy Club in Lowell on Friday, Feb. 15. "Although sometimes the court officers would find me sleeping in between sessions."

D'Angelo didn't intend to pursue a career in comedy when he graduated from Suffolk University School of Law and passed his bar exams in 1982. He certainly kept busy as a prosecutor in the DA's office, his case history reading like a laundry

list of fun times: manslaughter, armed robbery, insurance scams -- every type of crime.



His comic career started auspiciously with a roast at a friend's bachelor party, for which D'Angelo prepared extensively. His performance was received well, so he decided to try out the real thing. But he didn't just jump right in.

"I wrote for an entire year without performing because I didn't want to start out and be lousy," said D'Angelo.

When he felt he was well-enough prepared, D'Angelo started making the rounds at the Boston comedy clubs during the industry's heyday in the '80s. Soon, D'Angelo had his own weekly show at Nick's Comedy Stop, a premier Boston comedy club, and was doing shows all across town every night of the week. This was all while he continued to hold his day job as a prosecutor and later as a criminal defense attorney. By 1996, he was ready to shift to comedy full-time.

"I had a vehicular homicide case that sort of rubbed me the wrong way, and I said to myself, 'I could be in Vegas right now,' " said D'Angelo.

D'Angelo moved to Los Angeles for six years, where he realized he had to perfect his writing style to make it as a full-time comic.

"In Boston, I came up so fast and I was never in a hurry because I had my job to fall back on," said D'Angelo. "In L.A., I had to go back to square one and I ended up being a better writer because my act got a lot more personal."



Comedian Paul D'Angelo

Now that he's back in Massachusetts, D'Angelo works as diligently on his act as he did on any of his hundreds of trials and plea negotiations.

"I write down everything," said D'Angelo. "I probably have thousands of pages of ideas and jokes that aren't quite there yet. I love the whole writing process but it's so inexact, in terms of which jokes hit and which ones don't."

D'Angelo has taken his zany, animated show to every venue imaginable. He's opened for comedians like George Carlin and Jay Leno and recording artists like Aretha Franklin, Chicago and Tony Bennett. He's appeared on a Showtime comedy special and in the last year alone he's recorded three CDs and a DVD of his latest material, up for sale on his website. It's not the height of Boston comedy like it was in the '80s anymore, but D'Angelo is fine with it.

"It's not so much of a club business anymore -- now it's a lot of fundraisers, benefits, private events," said D'Angelo. "But it's been great for me because I get a ton of work at these events, through my contacts or word-of-mouth."

Tickets to Paul D'Angelo's show at the Back Page are \$15 and are available by calling 978-455-0978. For information, visit backpagelowell.com or pdangelo.com.