

Newport Winter Festival

Festival to open on a funny note



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By Matt Sheley | The Newport Daily News

NEWPORT, R.I. — Paul D'Angelo will return to the City-by-the-Sea on Friday, bringing some high praise with him.

Called “the funniest entertainer you’ve never heard of ... yet” by the Los Angeles Times, the 57-year-old native of Wakefield, Mass., will perform Friday at 8 p.m. at the Hotel Viking as part of the 2014 Newport Winter Festival. Mike Donovan, D'Angelo’s longtime friend, also is on the bill.

A lot of hard work goes into making people laugh, D'Angelo said during a recent phone interview. He said he’s constantly taking notes, playing with ideas and fine tuning his stand-up act, which evolves nightly. “When I work with young comics, they can’t believe how much goes into a good show,” D'Angelo said. “There are so many variables with comedy. The circumstances around a show, the lighting, the sound, the makeup of the crowd. Sometimes you know it’s a difficult situation before you get up on stage and you try to make the best of it.

“Usually, you learn from some of the worst experiences. Like when you’re performing in front of 500 people on a sound system that’s like the speaker at the Burger King drive-thru.”

D'Angelo, a successful attorney before switching to a career in comedy, performs three or four nights a week. He likes to keep things fresh, he said, and the audience directs where he goes with a show. If he’s appearing before a buttoned-up, corporate group, he might hold back a little, D'Angelo said. But not always.

“I’m not a set-up and punchline guy,” he said. “I’m more like George Carlin.

“A friend said the other day I use sarcasm to describe the human condition. Nothing preachy, but very physical and visual.”

His years as an assistant district attorney in Massachusetts, followed by a career as a defense lawyer, provided him plenty of opportunities to stand and speak before a crowd. And like a lawyer in a courtroom, a comic on the stage better be prepared, D'Angelo said.

He left law when he found it wasn’t fun to defend despicable people, he said. He took a year off to study comedy and to fine tune his craft.

“I was dealing with everyone’s problems, every day,” D'Angelo said of his law career. “No one goes to their lawyer on a good day. No one calls when they’re happy. Everybody is entitled to their day in court, to

a defense, and someone has to do it.

“I was fortunate and was able to screen my cases and decline things that really turned my stomach, but people have to pay the bills.”

His best advice for anyone looking to break into comedy is to get used to audiences. Aspiring comics should get out and perform whenever possible, he said.

“When you’re a comic, you have to start out with at least some basic, fundamental traits,” D’Angelo said. “Timing, a look, a particular thing that sets you apart. And then it’s all about experience and work, putting the time in. It can be tough now and time is at a premium. No matter how much work you do, you don’t know how it’s going to go until you get on the stage.”

Promoter Joe Rocco said D’Angelo always works hard to keep the audience entertained, no matter the venue.

“Just over the past six months, I have seen him perform for as few as 100 people at a fundraiser at the Waterman Grille in Providence and in front of more than 1,000 people at a private gala at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City,” Rocco said. “He not only had both audiences rolling in the aisles, but worked just as hard for his Providence appearance as he did in the New York City show.”

"D’Angelo has put on an amazing show every time he has seen him perform," Rocco said.

“The only difference between Paul D’Angelo and well-known talented comedians who fill 3,000-seat theaters like Louis CK, Bill Maher and Bill Burr ... is that they have received much more television and/or movie exposure,” Rocco said. “Paul is as funny, and arguably funnier, than just about all of the most famous standup comedians in the country.”

A veteran of the Newport comedy stops, D’Angelo said he loves coming to the City-by-the-Sea, a place where people go to have a good time and take a break from everyday life.

“Whatever show, I can’t wait to get up on the stage,” D’Angelo said. “I remember recently, I was getting ready to go up the ramp, and the stage manager said he was glad it wasn’t him. And I said, ‘This is what I do. I can’t wait to get out there.’”

“This might surprise some people, but that’s where I’m most comfortable. I work very hard at it and it’s like an athlete or musician who makes something look easy. The thing is there’s a lot of hard work and effort that goes into getting to that point.”

Tickets for the comedy show, which is for audiences 13 and older, cost \$25 or \$20 with a Winter Festival button (or \$50/\$5 for VIP) and are available by calling 847-7666, or online at newportwinterfestival.com.