

Shore Fun Improv!

by Matt Conte

In a little white room on a stage made of blue tape in Manasquan Recreation's Annex building, a grizzly wild animal roars, a goofy superhero fails, and a TV news anchor gets unprofessional on camera.

Jamie Mawn and Harry Harvey's Shore Fun Improv began years ago as an extension of the acting class that Mr. Harvey teaches at the high school. This dynamic duo, who have over 40 combined years at Manasquan teaching English and English-adjacent classes, run workshops for acting and writing during the summer in this same building.

Students of improv perform on-the-spot scenes and sketches based on various rules and games. For anyone who remembers what it's like to be thirteen, you'll know that it's a daring enough act to stand in front of your peers and perform, but on Friday nights from 6-8 p.m., Mr. Mawn and Mr. Harvey equip kids to get up and perform without even know what they're performing before they start.

Despite the rules of the games, there are really no limitations for what can happen on the stage on any given night. A stage play's set production may wow you and suck you immediately into the world of the play, but theater is truly magical when you witness the performer creating that world around them.

The range of students in the classes is wide. As the website, shorefunimprov.com, states, "we've taught everyone - star athletes, shy kids that parents dragged to workshops, talented actors, class clowns, and those daring individuals who just wanted to try something different."

As with the students, and with the world they create in their heads, the benefits of improv are far-reaching and fantastic. Students cite interacting with people they wouldn't otherwise, gaining public

speaking skills, writing essays, overcoming anxiety, and connecting to people by becoming better listeners as some of the aspects of their lives that have been changed since they started improv.

Two of the veterans of the class, Ryan Coulson and Miguel Garcia, have been learning and performing improv in Manasquan for almost a decade.

When I asked Ryan, Miguel, and the rest of the class what they like about improv, it seemed like they could have went on for hours.

"I cried when I first came here [in 5th grade]," Ryan, who is now a stand-out performer whether in an empty room or for a few thousand people in MHS's Jack Nicholson Theatre, told me after a class last month.

"I have anxiety, and now I know how to talk to people without being judged, because here it's a judgement-free zone, so it's like practice for real life," said Miranda Schindler, a student who wrote the acrostic poem that serves as the Shore Fun Improv website's mission statement.

Harvey and Mawn's Manasquan improvisational empire runs the gamut from these classes; to Mr. Harvey's MHS class; to a series of summer shows; to their crown jewel, the Improv For Ron show. The show, held annually at the high school, is named after MHS alumni Ron Kubik. Ron took Mr. Harvey's acting class and become a US Army Ranger after graduation, before giving his life in Afghanistan and earning the military's third highest honor, the Silver Star, for saving the lives of 5 Rangers, 5 Afghan soldiers, and 19 Afghani women and children. The show raises money for a scholarship in Ron's name.

This year's show is scheduled for May 21 from 7:30-9 p.m. More information about the show, about classes, and about improv in general can be found on their website, shorefunimprov.com.

