



Tribune photo by JASON BEHNKEN

Open mike night at The Improv in Ybor City has given Rolando Pozo, a computer consultant, a chance to apply the lessons he learned in comedy school.

ASPIRING COMIC

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Pozo wears a white Guayabera and creates the persona of a Cracker Cuban

the class was free.

"I had no concept on how to get into it," said Pozo, 32, of West Tampa. "Like acting, I thought you were born a comic or you weren't."

In a short time, Pozo has performed at about 30 open mike and guest set shows at the Tampa Improv, Orlando Improv, Coconuts Comedy Club in Clearwater and a Vero Beach club.

On stage, Pozo, who at 118 pounds has the energy of a man on a strict coffee and energy bar diet, wears a white Guayabera and creates the persona of a Cracker Cuban. (His father is Cuban; his mother is from Ohio.) His material is adult humor that pokes fun at himself and life's absurdities.

"The thing that drives people away from [becoming comedians] is they have to bring all their insecurities to the table and share them with everybody," Pozo said. "That is where the material is at. I know I'm skinny. I know I'm balding."

At a recent open mike contest at the Tampa Improv, Pozo got laughs and applause from a

nearly sold-out crowd. He ran through a 5-minute monologue that poked fun at his weight, his 5-year-old son and his wife. Although the crowd was receptive, Pozo didn't win the contest, which offered \$100 and a chance to compete in a larger local competition.

Pozo said he needs to work on his stage presence to become more comfortable. His main concern is saying every joke as he practiced it. That preoccupation doesn't allow him to concentrate on other aspects of his routine.

"To me, to be awesome at something you have to be on autopilot," Pozo said. "You know the material so well it's planted in your brain."

Pozo works on his comedy for about 20 hours a week. Anything that catches his attention, he writes down to try to incorporate it into his routine. To add to his repertoire, he observes situations, analyzes and writes. On the day of a performance, he doesn't work, turns off his telephone and rehearses the entire day.

"I never want to be average in anything I do," Pozo said. "I want to be the best. I over-

Aspiring Comic Willing To Take Risks Involved To Achieve Fame

By JOSÉ PATIÑO GIRONA
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TAMPA—Rolando Pozo gets excited when he talks about most subjects. But when discussing his new passion—comedy—his eyes beam, his language speeds up and his body moves like melted butter.

Pozo, who runs a computer consulting business, never planned on a comedy career. Among family and friends, he was the wise guy—the one making jokes, doing the unthinkable and being the center of attention. His experiences with large audiences

compensate for everything I do. I go nuts."

Reaching success in the comedy business isn't easy with the number of people who have the same dream. In the Bay area alone, there are about a half-dozen comedy clubs, and most have amateur night contests.

To be successful, you have to be a good writer and deliver the material well, said Bob Shoemaker, owner of Coconuts Comedy Clubs in St. Petersburg and Clearwater. Shoemaker estimates that one in 50 or one in 100 comedians can make a living at it.

"You are either good at this or you are not," Shoemaker said. "Some people will always be an open miker or amateur."

Pozo doesn't come from a family of professional comedians. He said his father is the funniest man he knows but never tried to make a career out of it. Pozo's family is supportive and regularly attends his performances.

"It kind of surprised us when he said he wanted to go into that," his father, Rolando Pozo, said. "But at the same time, it didn't. He isn't shy. There isn't a shy bone in his body."

Pozo was born near Los Angeles, but his parents moved regularly. They finally settled into a West Tampa condominium in 1988.

came as a singer with a middle school boys choir, and his work as a radio, club and party disc jockey.

Comedy was born a year ago for Pozo when he went to the Tampa Improv. While waiting to see a comedian, he saw an advertisement in the club for a comedy class. Pozo paid \$200 and took the seven-week course.

The class started with 15 people and slowly dwindled to five. When that class ended, Pozo paid \$100 and took it again. The third time he took it,

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Pozo not afraid of hard work.

In middle school, he was a soloist in a boys choir at Mary Help of Christians School. But in high school, he dropped out of singing and entertainment. He tried high school wrestling and martial arts but wasn't inspired by the sports. He got his equivalency diploma and joined the Air Force, where he served for 6½ years.

While in the Air Force, he was stationed in Alaska, where he got a job with a local radio station. He started as an overnight disc jockey at a Top 40 station and later was promoted to disc jockey of a popular evening music program. When his wife, Kimberly, became pregnant, Pozo left his job and moved to Tampa to be near family, he said.

About the time Pozo got the comedy bug, he started his own computer consulting company, Rolando & Associates Consulting Inc.

But even the responsibility of running a new business and taking care of his family hasn't distracted him from comedy. He has dreams, and he hopes comedy is an avenue to rise in entertainment.

"The reason I am a risk taker is because my parents weren't risk takers," said Pozo, who claims comedy is the hardest job he has ever done. "I decided to do the exact opposite and take as many risks as I can."

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