

THE COMEDY GAZELLE

WORLD COMEDY EXPO
CHICAGO 2022



ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I first moved to Chicago, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey supercharge herself with a firm slap of the puss.

Why haven't I heard of her before?

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it's easy to miss.

That's why I'm starting The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to showcase this city's unrivaled talent. To keep everyone up-to-date on the scene, and to do it in a fun way. And not just in a one-off article, but all the time.

Each issue will include an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

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INTERVIEW: KERRY SHEEHAN

Kerry Sheehan is the Business Director of The World Comedy Expo, a brand new comedy festival taking place in Chicago from March 25-27. She brings over 25 years of experience to the festival, including past roles at The Second City and Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. We discussed year one logistics, submitting to festivals, Chicago comedy and more.

What excites you the most about The World Comedy Expo? Is there anything you're particularly excited for people to see?

So many things excite me about this, starting with how exciting it is to have another festival focused on comedy in Chicago. We've had many over the years and a lot of them concluded a few years back, even pre-pandemic, so I think the time is right to be doing this. Chicago is really excited about it and clearly we've captured the attention of not just our city, but the nation and a lot of international comedians. I'm really excited to be doing it and what I think is really unique about this festival is the idea of bringing together folks from all over the world. We're going to have so much diversity geographically, different religious backgrounds, different native languages, then of course the different types of comedy we're showcasing. It's about half-and-half ensembles and stand up comedians, so we get to really showcase what Chicago is known for and put it out there to the world.

You're bringing in people from different continents and tackling all these different forms of comedy. Year one you're going right after it.

We were trying to keep year one a little bit smaller, because initially we were talking about it being a weeklong festival. We then determined, "Oh, we'll just do it over three days and that'll make it much more manageable logistically." We did want to go a little bit smaller, but then when we put the word out to the world, we were pleasantly surprised and a bit overwhelmed, in a good way, by the number of people who submitted. So in an effort to showcase as many great people as we could, we're up to almost 180 performers. We're going to do 27 shows and we've had some really great support from the local comedy community. We see this as mutually beneficial because a big goal of ours is to promote our own festival, but perhaps more importantly is the idea of showcasing Chicago and Chicago's existing comedy venues and



schools and clubs, and really reminding the universe that Chicago is a top, if not the top, comedy center of our fine planet. We're excited to do it.

Are you trying to bring The Expo to other cities as well, or is this solely a Chicago focused festival?

The initial thought was that we would move around to different cities and different international cities as well. Once we put the word out to the Chicago community, I got so much feedback like, "Thank god you're bringing a comedy festival to Chicago, we've lost so many and we're really excited that you're doing this." And so, we've been pleasantly surprised by that, but are also willing to shift our gears and our thinking around the future of the festival. In my opinion, I think we can kind of have the best of both worlds. We can continue to have an annual festival here in Chicago, but also have another showcase in a different city around the world. One of the things that's always been really interesting to me is looking at different comedic styles that exist in other parts of the world. We're very interested in going to other pockets internationally that have a strong comedy scene, but might have a different style of comedy, then really having that be the focus while also bringing other talent into those cities.

You mentioned previous Chicago comedy festivals. What have you learned from being around for so many of those? Is there anything you're trying to emulate or scrap?

I've been involved with a lot of different festivals outside the comedy world: music and theater. There's a lot that I've learned just by being part of the logistics involved with any festival, regardless of what you're presenting. I've had the pleasure the past many years to be working for the city of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, so I really got to see the behind the scenes of some major Chicago legacy festivals like Taste of Chicago, Blues, Gospel, World Music Fest, all of those events. So, from a logistics perspective, yes, I borrow and steal ideas for the back-end presentation and marketing of festivals. But I think for comedy in particular, one of the things I've observed is just how community building the whole experience can be. So for me, going into this festival, I really wanted to have opportunities for comedians to not just perform, but to network and learn as well. We kind of kept this piece a little bit smaller, but we do have a handful of panels and workshops that would be a great opportunity for comedians and others to learn and network. It would be the greatest thing ever if we have visiting comedians that leave Chicago on March 27 and then remain friends and have accomplished things both from a learning perspective and also have gotten ideas about where else they could perform in Chicago and in the United States.

I know there are a lot of local comics who are very excited about this, but might've missed the submission deadline. Can you elaborate on how they get still involved and be a part of that community building aspect?

There are a few ways, and I'll start by saying I'm sorry if you didn't hear about or missed the deadline. We did what we could to get the word out to the local community, but it's tricky. You're really kind of relying on social media and word of mouth to do that the first year. Subsequent years, I think it'll be very different, but there were a lot of people who missed out. I'm sorry. We have a portal on our website now to get updates from us, so if you really want to be sure you know about things for next year, sign up through there now and you'll get an alert as to when we're opening submissions for next year.

And that'll still be in Chicago, correct?

That is the plan. There will certainly be a year or two in Chicago. Then maybe in addition to that, another secret international location to be named. That might happen

at the halfway point. But to answer your question about how to get involved if you're not a performer, I think there are a few ways to do that. Like I said, we have a couple different panels that are free and open to everyone. And we have a handful of workshops that are on a really eclectic kind of mix of topics, so I think something in there will appeal to just about anyone. We also do have a pool of volunteers. We have a pretty healthy list going already, but if someone wanted to hop on and join, there's a way to do that through the website as well.

I'm curious about the submission and selection process. Can you talk a bit about the thought process that went into that and how you see it changing moving forward?

We are a very small but mighty team. And we're all volunteers. I would say that moving into next year, certainly on the review end, we intend to pull in some more individuals to be a part of that process. We got over 300 submissions in year one, so I anticipate in subsequent years it's going to be quite a bit more. So just the sheer volume of reviewing people's submissions takes a lot of time, and we did it with a small group. So I think we'll need to broaden that out a bit, just so we can really make sure each and every person who submits to us gets the attention they deserve. One of the things that was extremely important to me was that each and every person that submitted had their materials reviewed in their entirety. It was also really important to us that we had folks from all over the place, and had gender diversity, and the LGBTQIA population super represented, and folks with disabilities as part of our festival. We wanted the world, really, to be represented. And often it was a conversation of "let's make sure we're seeing people we haven't seen before." That's really exciting. It really came down to "if these comedians are funny

and really making us laugh and moving us, I don't care if this is their first year or first festival." It really came down to that quality piece and what I can tell you is that we've got a lot of it.

What would you say has been your biggest challenge so far in pulling all this together?

I would say really the manpower behind it. This festival was sort of [Artistic Director] Saku [Yanagawa]'s baby from the beginning and he started to wrangle a couple of people he thought could help with it, and those people wrangled a few more people. And all of this started sort of mid-pandemic. A lot of us had more free time during the pandemic, so we had more people involved early on. Then as we gratefully came out of the pandemic, people were getting busier, so we've been operating with a pretty small team and that for me was the largest challenge. It should be made very, very clear that the amount of back-end work that goes along with a festival, even of this size with just three days, is substantial. It is a substantial amount of time and manpower. Even circling back to the review process, when you think about 300 submissions and what that looks like from a time perspective. Because it's not just the 3-5 minutes of a video, you're really reading people's materials, you might be looking up a few other things that they've presented online. It's really time consuming to do it right and to do it well, and that was really our goal.



Can you elaborate on the additional research you did? Are you considering social followings and looking at comedians as holistic pieces?

First and foremost, the focus was definitely on the clip that was submitted. There might have been issues like the sound or video quality, so I might pop online and check out something else. It was really more to the benefit of the performer. Instead of writing someone off, I would go and seek out more information.

It's sort of the opposite of what I'd say to my teenage daughter, which is whatever you put on social media know that any prospective employer is going to see it! It was really the reverse. I was certainly going back and looking to make more of a positive determination on someone. We would never go and seek out reasons to not have someone. But at the same time, if I can wear my mom hat, maybe don't do something stupid on social media because maybe somebody would make a decision about that.

Was the sheer number of followers at all a factor?

I have looked at that certainly, both for this festival and other times I'm booking for a venue. I take it with a grain of salt. There's a lot that can be done with social media to skew some of those numbers. While having a lot of real followers can tell a certain story, I personally feel what tells the truest story is actually in your clip and what you're submitting. I know that what I love to see is somebody's full set versus a compilation. And that's kind of for stand up, sketch or improv. There were some people that submitted these really short snippets, and I kind of like to get the arch of what's happening. So, I think going into next year we'd put more specificity around that when we ask for submissions. Submit your whole set, or at least something continuous so I can see how you're flowing from one thing to another. It's also really great to not only see and hear audience reaction, but to see and hear and watch your interaction with the audience. That's not always relevant or possible depending on the style of comedy, but seeing the way someone interacts with an audience is so important. There are some people who are just incredible at that and I think that shows they're super prepared for what could happen. There are so many unknowns. You've got drunk people, people who are there with their entire bachelor party —

Oh yeah, that's the dream. The bachelorette party.

I remember that. Definitely when I was at Second City, we had a lot of groups. Groups can be awesome, but they can also take over a room. But you gotta be prepared for that. Heckling is just ridiculous and if there are general comedy fans reading this, don't heckle people. Participate by clapping and laughing and also responding if you're being asked to contribute, but the random heckling is just ugh.

I saw in your interview with the Sun-Times that you didn't want to have traditional headliners at The Expo, correct?

Yeah, and it's not so much that we have anything against that concept. There are so many phenomenal stand up comedians that are already booking venues that are in the thousands of seats, but we want to get more into that zone of comedians that are really on the up. There are a lot of folks on the roster that have absolutely been performing for, in some cases, decades, but what happens if you have these major headliners is all the attention goes to them. And one of the things that I love, especially from working at The Second City for so long, is that the individual actors are so important as individuals, but really the focus is on the ensemble and the art and the story. I think for me it's just really nice to see the emphasis on the genres of comedy and the overall work that people are doing, versus any individual person. And of course that concept falls much more amidst the sketch and improv world. Obviously stand up comedians certainly want to get their name out there. But what I will say is often stand ups are part of showcases, where there might be several of them all on one show. They're all such good friends and so supportive of one another. One of the things I love to see is the other stand up comedians watching their friends up on stage. They're often the loudest clappers, laughers in the entire room and I think it really speaks to the nature of what comedy is about. I'm not gonna say there aren't competitive elements, but it's really very, very supportive and very collaborative.

Do you expect a lot of industry folks to be in town for The Expo?

Yeah, I'm definitely hearing from different managers and agents and club owners, different bookers and talent buyers that are just excited to see people. We're kind of making it easy for those folks and consolidating these shows in three different locations. If they're interested in somebody who's more a sketch comedy performer, those will be more focused at Second City and The Den. If they're interested in stand up

comedians, those will be largely centered at Laugh Factory and Second City as well. And then Annoyance, they have sketch and improv, but we're focusing a lot of our improv performers at that particular venue. We're making it really easy for industry folks, and that makes it exciting for the performers as well. You never know who's sitting in an audience or who someone in an audience might know or be related to. So if we could play some sort of role in further elevating a lot of these folks who might not be household names yet, then I think we've done a really good job.

Last couple questions for you. What have you learned personally having gone through this experience? Is there anything that helped you grow at all?

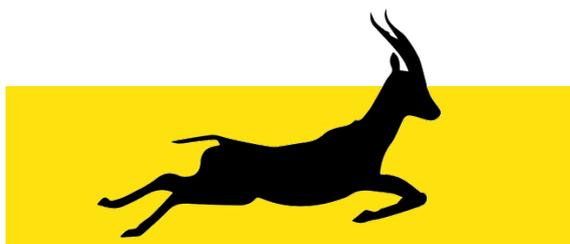
Yes, many things. Beginning with we are a start up business, essentially. So we had to construct everything from the beginning. We are a registered LLC, so we have our licensing and that structure together and bank accounts and insurance and all of those things that are necessary for a small business. We had to construct a website and the content and mission of the festival. You asked me earlier what I sort of pulled from other festivals, that all informed what we wanted to do. I think everyone would probably do the same if they're going to start their own business, but what we wanted to do was pull from all the things that we love from other festivals that we attended, but then also very specially avoid the elements we've seen that we didn't love. And a lot of that has to do with the way we are working with artists. It's important to all of us that every person involved with this project, and certainly every performer, is treated with care and respect. I don't care if this is your first festival or your 100th festival, everybody is important and we're glad that everybody's here. A lot of people are spending their own time and dollars to

get here from as far away as Rwanda, so we really want them to have a great experience. There's a lot of that that we can control just by our behavior and how we're putting the festival together. And then the other big piece of that, and it may in some way be the most important piece, is really making sure these comedians have an audience in front of them. We really want these houses to be filled. We made the ticket prices for these shows extremely accessible, in my opinion. Nothing's exceeding \$20, and for that you're seeing a lot of performers. If it's sketch and improv, you're seeing two different groups on a bill. If it's a stand up show, you're seeing between six and nine different comedians. It's really a good bang for your buck. And all of these venues are just awesome and have been so wonderful to work with. So my note to Chicago is to please come out and see as many of these shows as you can. Support these comedians. Go and see something or someone you haven't seen before. Check out a venue you haven't been to before. We're kind of viewing this as a big PR campaign for comedy in Chicago.

And what should people know about Chicago comedy? What to you makes Chicago comedy so unique?

I think the number of schools and clubs and theaters that focus on comedy. It's not small. We're participating with four of them, but there are tons of places to consume comedy in the city. I look at Chicago as the place that you work. I've heard this time and time again, whether we're talking about a comedian, a musician or an actor. You can really hone your craft here. It's safe, it's supportive, it's accessible, and there's tons of opportunity. If I were giving out advice to comedians, you get better by performing and having that stage time and there's just so much opportunity here. There are a bunch of folks on the World Comedy Expo that are performing seven nights a week, and that's no joke. I know tons of stand up comedians going from one club to another in the same evening. There's just a lot of opportunity here, and I feel like because of that and because there's this huge diversity in club size there's something for everyone. If you're just getting going, there's tons of open mics, there's cafés and smaller environments and that's an awesome place to start. Then there's the next level and the next level, all the way up to – I'm sitting here a couple of miles from the United Center. So when you become Kevin Hart you can still perform in Chicago. It's just that huge, huge range of opportunity is just amazing here.

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World Comedy Expo 2022
Panel Announcement

Touring Internationally

with Vince Acevedo, Pedja Bajović, John McCombs, Saku Yanagawa
Moderated By: D.J. Rybski

WORLD COMEDY EXPO

FRIDAY
MARCH 25TH
11:00 PM

LAUGH FACTORY
3175 N. BROADWAY, CHICAGO

WORLD COMEDY EXPO

WWW.WORLDCOMEDYEXPO.COM

HOST: Geoffrey Asmus (Chicago, IL)

Shawn Banks (Chicago, IL)	Maria Palombi (Rome, Italy)	Ty Riggs (Chicago, IL)
Tyler Horvath (Chicago, IL)	Tanya B. Crossley (Los Angeles, CA)	Joey Cerone (Bloomington IN)
Kadeem Richardson (Baltimore, MD)	Chandler Chase (Chicago, IL)	WE ALL LAUGH IN THE SAME LANGUAGE

FRIDAY
MARCH 25TH
9:00 PM

The Second City

THE SECOND CITY
DONNY'S SKYBOX THEATRE
230 W. NORTH AVE, 4TH FLOOR
CHICAGO

WORLD COMEDY EXPO

WWW.WORLDCOMEDYEXPO.COM

HOST: Tucker Millett (Chicago, IL)

Abby Vatterott (St. Louis, MO)	Bobby Budds (Chicago, IL)	Chelse Greaux (Los Angeles, CA)
Vince Acevedo (Chicago, IL)	ComicDoc (Sarasota, FL)	Kieron Harrell (Chicago, IL)
Becca Nix Tham (Chicago, IL)	Max Shanker (Chicago, IL)	Hobert Thompson (Chicago, IL)

World Comedy Expo 2022
Workshop Announcement

Intro to The Art of Slow Comedy Improv

with Jimmy Carrane

WORLD COMEDY EXPO

FRIDAY
MARCH 25, 2022
7:00 PM CDT

WORLD COMEDY EXPO

LANDRY & SUMMERS

MESSING WITH MASON

THE ANNOYANCE
CHICAGO'S ONLY FUNKY COMEDY

The Annoyance Theatre
851 W Belmont Ave
Chicago, IL 60657

RETIREMENT PARTY

by Luke Ipsum (@lukeipsum)

An office.

Maria: Thank you all for spending your time with us this afternoon. As you know, we're here to celebrate the retirement of two people that have given their everything into this company. Everyone, please let's give a loud round of applause to Grant and Paul!

Everyone applauds.

Maria: Now, since they put me in charge of organizing tonight's festivities, I thought hey we could do a regular retirement or... we could do a fun, comedy-style roast!

The employees in the break room "ooooo."

Maria: Okay, we'll start with Grant. Grant, I have seen you eat your own poop at your desk for the past 20 years. Every time you eat your poop you're always like yum yum yummy! It's like Hey Grant! You shouldn't be saying yum yum yummy! That's poop!

Paul: Grant! Poop isn't yum yum yummy! Come on buddy! That's poop!

Maria: Okay next up Paul. Okay, so Paul is always late to meetings and boy oh boy does that—

Grant: I don't eat my own poop.

Maria: Grant, it's a joke. Settle down okay? Okay so as I was saying, Paul is like a clock that goes tok tok tok...

Grant: I don't eat my own poop and I don't think poop is "yum yum yummy."

Paul: Hey Grant, it's a joke. I mean you're starting to sound a bit annoying, maybe you should consider joining the sales team.

Maria: Woah! Paul, did you just come up with that right now?

Paul: Just off the top of my head.

Maria: Haha incredible. You are surely going to be missed Paul.

Grant: Well, I've seen Maria drink her period blood out of her diva cup and say "bon appétit." Maria! That's period blood! That's not "bon appétit!"

Maria starts to cry. Paul puts an arm on her to comfort her.

Paul: Grant. What is your problem?

Grant: She just told everyone I love eating my own poop!

Maria: It was a joke you poop-eating monster!

Grant: I don't eat my own poop!

Paul: Grant, you're always in your office dipping your poop in soy sauce with chopsticks like your poop is a crab rangoon.

Grant: I don't dip my poop into soy sauce and eat my poop like a crab rangoon!

Maria: Grant, why would we make that up? Plus, if we were lying, explain this photo.

Maria holds up a blank sheet of paper.

Grant: That is a blank sheet of paper.

Paul: Grant, It's starting to seem like all that poop has gone to your eyes.

Grant: Just because I went on a camping trip and got pink eye does not mean that I like to eat my own poop!

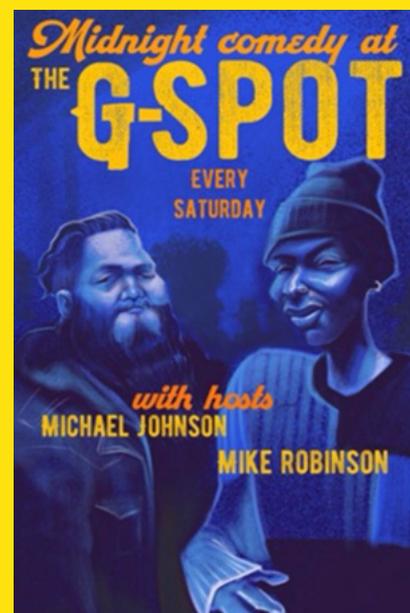
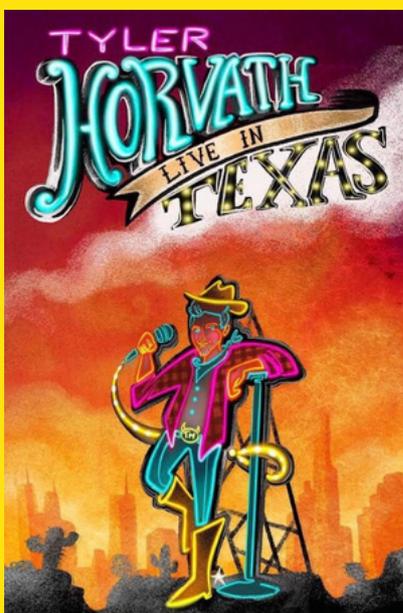
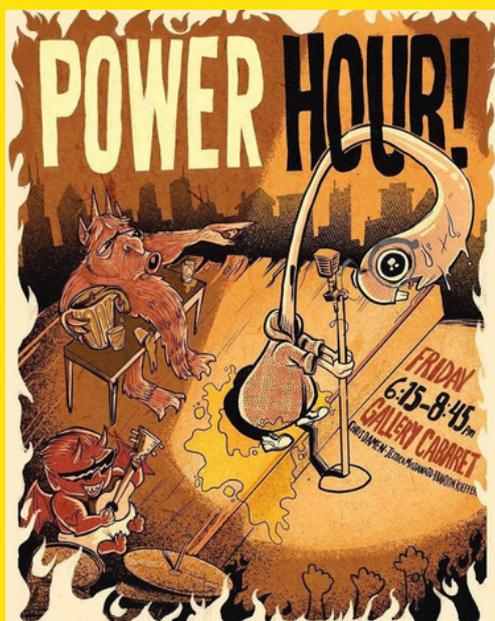
Grant takes a sip out of a party glass and gags.

Grant: Jesus Christ! What is this?!

Paul & Maria: Grant it's pee! Yum yum yummy!

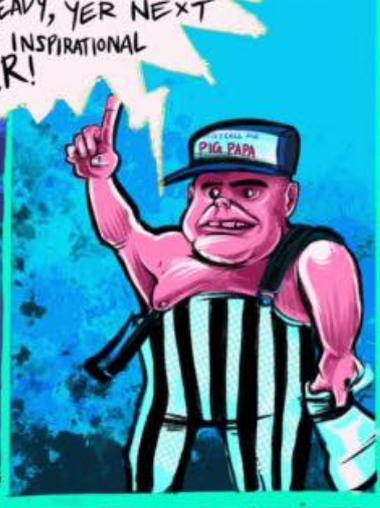
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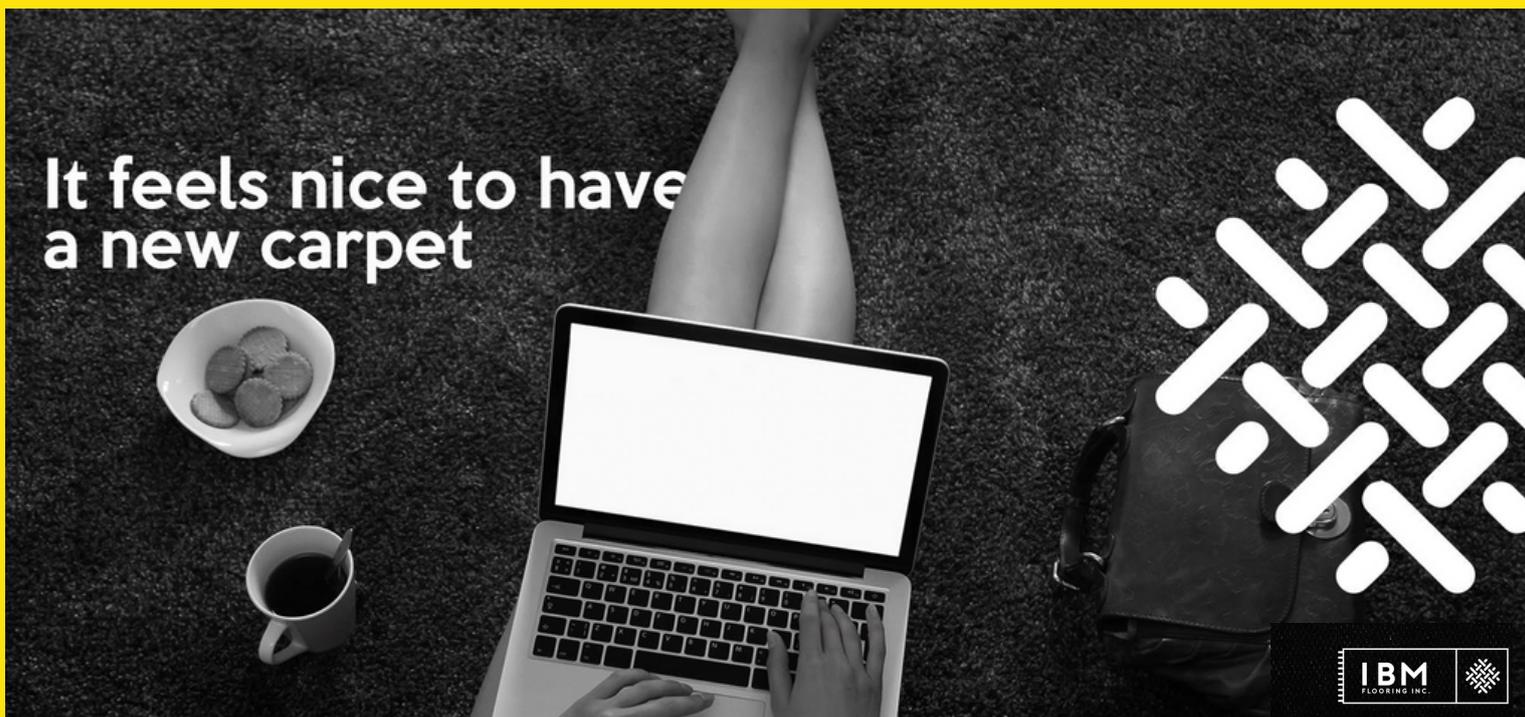
TOM RYAN (@TIPS.ARE.APPRECIATED) STARTED DRAWING CARICATURES 10 YEARS AGO AT SIX FLAGS GURNEE, IL BEFORE MOVING ON TO HIS 2018 KIA SOUL. NOW HE DRAWS CARICATURES FOR FAIRS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. TOM LOVES COLLABORATING WITH COMEDIANS TO DESIGN POSTERS, MERCH, AND HAS ALSO DESIGNED ALL OF OUR COVERS! IF YOU'D LIKE TO COMMISSION HIM FOR YOU OWN ART, YOU CAN EMAIL HIM AT TOMRYANILLUSTRATION@GMAIL.COM OR REACH OUT ON INSTAGRAM.





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