

## A new sort of comedy hits Gallup's funny bone

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun  
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## Audiences both laugh and participate with Rez City Improv

A unique type of comedy was in full swing at the Gallup Downtown Conference Center at 204 W. Coal Ave. on Oct. 15, when Rez City Improv & Comedy showcased the talents of local comedians.

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Improv acting entails performances with absolutely no rehearsal prior to the show. In this case, performers came up with topics — with help from the audience — like acting out scenes from newspaper headlines, and one-person monologues.

The local comedians on the bill were: Isiah Yazzie, Eric Trevizo, Adrienne Chalepah, guest Jamar Hall, and Efron Yazzie.

Knifewing Segura, Downtown Conference Center owner, said improv comedy is new to Gallup, and he can see it catching on.

“Most of these talented comedians are on my rooster for Native Stars Talent Agency, and I’m really impressed with this new type of comedy for the area,” Segura said. “They’re pretty excited about it, and it’s something new for downtown — we’re always venturing with something new and hope it catches on with people around here.”

Filmmakers from the University of California Los Angeles were also at the event to film the aspiring local comedians, primarily because the majority of the featured performers are Native Americans.

“I’m really impressed that they came all the way down from California to film this event and tell others about it,” Segura said.

The show began with an introduction of the comedians, and it took off from that point with help from the audience, who supplied most of the improv ideas to the actors.

Audience member Allistair McCray said he came to show his support for this type of comedy.

“I came down to check out some of the local comedians and the comedy,” he said. “Online, I heard they were pretty good with good feedback on some of the shows, so I came to give them support.”

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Talent like Jamar Hall, who found his inspiration from other Native comedians, traveled from as far away as Albuquerque for the show.

"I drove in from Albuquerque because I like bringing laughter to the rez," Hall said. "I am half Navajo, but some people can't tell that — my jokes are basically based off me. I grew up on the rez, so I feel like I'm Navajo [he laughs] even though I don't look it."

Hall said he grew up watching Navajo comedians as a kid and decided to give comedy a try.

"Being from the Farmington/Shiprock area, I got into comedy watching them in high school, and just these other Navajo's doing it, and I could identify with some of their jokes and thought, 'I should try this,'" he said.

While Hall's been performing for the last four years, comedian Adrienne Chalepah, who is from Oklahoma, has been performing with Rez City Improv for about a year.

"It's really a good training for performers to be on stage, with no preparation," she said. "You just come up with things off the top of your head and try to be funny."

Chalepah explained that most ideas for the improv acts come from the audience, and this makes it fun for everyone.

"People enjoy it, too," she said. "The audience also has to have an imagination; they have to be creative with us as well. It's not just us performing — it's the audience and their ideas, too."

The budding comedian found her passion in laughter and is now performing comedy full-time.

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"I've always been a class clown and a really goofy person," Chalepah said. "In 2005, I decided to try it out on stage and I fell in love with it. But I didn't take it serious till 2010."

Chalepah's performed around the country, and can be found on Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook and, she jokes with a laugh, "if you say my name three times in the mirror... I'm there. Laughter is medicine."

Isiah Yazzie of Gallup trained as a comedian.

"Improv is just making up things on the spot, but also making it funny, having a story to tell while you're doing it," he said. "We get audience suggestions, no script, just all improvised."

Yazzie, who's been performing comedy since 2012, aims to hold improv workshops, too.

"I want kids to know what it is... to keep a hold of their creativity," he explained. "Being Navajo, I would like to hold these conferences on what improv is all about on the Navajo Nation."

Native American comedy has become a powerful means of expression, inspiring even non-Natives like Eric Trevizo, who's worked backstage at some of these comedy shows.

"I've always wanted to be a comedian ever since seeing comedy shows in Shiprock," Trevizo said. "I used to be part of security for the comedy shows and that's how it all started."

With laughter, Trevizo added, "I'm from Mexico and have been hiding in Shiprock."

**Visit: [GallupDCC.com](http://GallupDCC.com) and [rezcityimprov.wordpress.com](http://rezcityimprov.wordpress.com)**

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