

'Queen of Clean' comedian Donna East comes home to perform

By Gina Joseph
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New Yorkers call her "the queen of clean." And while her punch lines are not spiked with vulgarity, they still pack a wallop of —.

"I called ... to cancel my cell phone," comedian Donna East quipped in one of her routines. "I told them I couldn't afford it. But ... customer service said, 'We'll give you two months free.' I was like, 'Ohhh... I don't know.' They said, 'We'll double your minutes and cut your rate.' I whined. 'Ohhh, but I don't like my phone... it's old.' They said, 'We'll send you a brand new \$200 phone.' I said, 'Ohhh... OK. Can I talk to you about my other bills?'"

Often described as the blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl-next-door, the Stevenson High School graduate's comedy ranges from dealing with corporate America, and growing up as the daughter of a Detroit autoworker to driv-

er's education lessons and just growing up.

"Toys have really had an influence on my life. I mean, I'd be playing with my Barbie and think I should be beautiful and skinny, but then my Easy Bake Oven would scream from the corner, 'Hey! Make a chocolate cake!'"

As a youngster, East longed to be an actor. After graduating from Michigan State University and doing a stint as a news reporter—too "depressing"—she mustered the courage to audition for an opening at Second City in Detroit. She was a finalist, but when the final call didn't come, she decided to move to New York City.

Besides a theater gig and a few commercials, East found work as a stand-up comedian. She started out as a dirty comic or doing what is known in the business as "blue humor." East said it got her laughs and bookings,

but she started feeling bad about the act.

"It wasn't me," said East, who performs Monday in a benefit at the Anchor Bay High School Performing Arts Center. "I don't use that kind of language in my every day life. On top of that, I'm Christian."

So she bowed out of the limelight and went to work behind the scenes as a production assistant and producer for several television shows on LIFETIME and PAX cable networks.

"Then God told me to get back up and start doing comedy for Him," East said. "Not audibly—I just got this strong feeling that I was suppose to change my act and make people laugh again."

It was around this time that East received an anonymous envelope containing an article about clean comedy in churches, and word that a nationally recognized Christian comedian was looking for a writer. After the week of epiphanies, East



DONNA EAST

quit her job at the cable TV networks and accepted the opportunity to write for the touring Christian comedian. Had she gone to work the following Monday—taking the commuter train and stopping for a coffee at the café located in the World Trade Center as she always did—she may have been among the casualties of 9/11.

On the comedy circuit, the wife and mother-to-be has toured with Chonda Pierce, opened for John Tesh, appeared on PAX's Bananas comedy show, at The New York City Comedy Club and the Lamb's Theater and produced the first "clean comedy" night at Stand-Up New York. She's also a contributing writer for the Martha Bolton (Bob Hope's first female staff writer) book, "Living It Down By Laughing It Up: Life's Most Embarrassing Moments."

Now she's returning home to perform in a benefit for the Bette Dunlap Carrothers Vocal Music Scholarship at Anchor Bay High School Performing Arts Center. Show time is 7:30 p.m. at the Center.

East said her act will include some wacky characters, including her most popular funny girl Norma from the KISS (Keep it simple stupid) school of driving. And because it's a benefit for a

music scholarship, she'll relate a funny story about her experiences as an aspiring piano student.

Tickets for the ABHS benefit (\$15 adults and \$10 for seniors/students) may be purchased at the door or in advance by calling, (586) 725-8051. Anchor Bay High School Performing Arts Center is located at 6319 County Line Road in Fair Haven. The Bette Dunlap Carrothers Vocal Music Scholarship is handled through the Anchor Bay Community Foundation.

On Tuesday, East will perform for a ladies/high school girls night out event at Trinity Lutheran Church and School, 45160 Van Dyke in Utica. Tickets are \$12 each or \$10 each with the purchase of two or more for the 6:30 p.m. show. For more information, call (586) 731-4490 ext. 138 or e-mail brig99@yahoo.com.